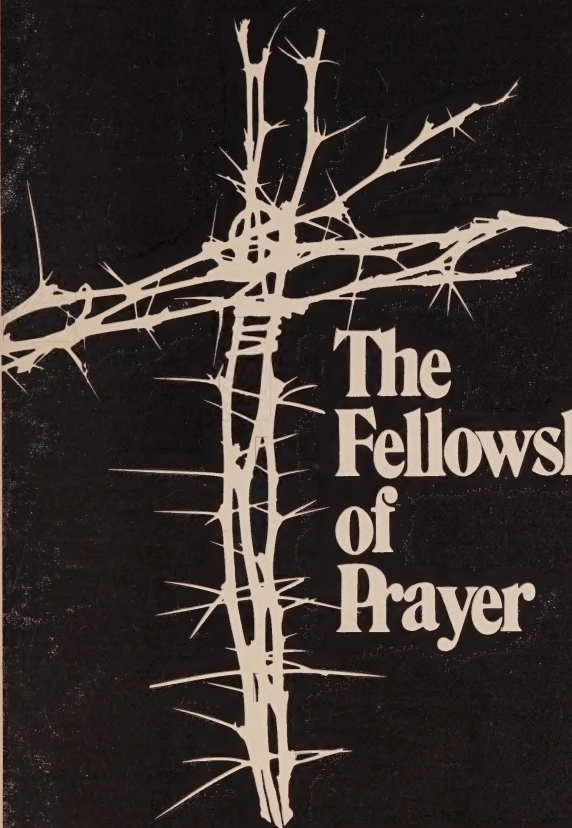




The Fellowship of Prayer

Lenten Season 1979

Hope in The Lord

God has never made a promise he did not keep. Our experiences of his forgiveness, his grace, his courage and his presence all serve to undergird our belief in his promise of eternal life which the coming of Easter, 1979, will once again lift up in celebration.

During this season of Lent I would have you recall some of the ways whereby God's actions have helped to weave the threads of faith into the fabric of countless lives, including your own. It is for such recalling that these brief meditations have been written. If they fulfill their purpose, you will be led on a forty-six day walk in those paths of memory without which all hope is vain, but with which all persons may renew their trust in God's never-failing love.

*He promises to all who trust him
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
his presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in his kingdom which has no end.*

These closing phrases of the United Church of Christ *Statement of Faith* have provided a rough outline. The suggested memories and hopes are of my own choosing.

George D. Alley
130 Broad Boulevard
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44221

An Editorial Word

We welcome old friends and new ones to our readership, especially those of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) communion. This issue of THE FELLOWSHIP OF PRAYER is the first to be published by Christian Board of Publication, a publishing arm of the Disciples' denomination. Their prompt and efficient adoption of this project, following the dissolution of Eden Publishing House, makes it possible to continue without interruption.

George Alley's strong, caring faith and his able sharing of it will be both support and nourishment for those who journey with him through this Lenten season. It is his suggestion that the usual "amens" be omitted from the prayers so that readers may pray as long as they wish without being interrupted by the printed word!

Our deliberate hope is that all of us may go and grow together in all that God's promises provide.

R. W. Raber
Florence, Missouri 65329

The Fellowship of Prayer

**Lenten Season
1979**

GEORGE D. ALLEY

Printed in the USA

The Keeping of Lent

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8) Read Isaiah 55:1-13

One month before his death, (March 15, 1865) Abraham Lincoln wrote to Thurlow Weed, "Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and themselves." Flattered or not, Christian people have gone about the keeping of Lent with the deliberate admission that this difference has been quite evident in their own living. The admission implies first, that we are somewhat aware of what God's purposes are and second, that we have not enough made them our own. We humbly acknowledge that we have not practiced what we have preached, that our vision of what God calls us to be and to do has dimmed and that we stand in need of significant cleansing and renewal. To be truly effective, Lent must be set apart not as a season in which we merely "give up" something as a means of discipline, but as an opportunity to *take up* something that will bear fruits worthy of repentance. What more meaningful exercise then, than to call to remembrance some clear examples of how God's mercies have been bestowed: in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health—and to respond accordingly?

Our confessions presuppose that we are at least on speaking terms with one whom we know to be forgiving. We likewise approach him as being constant, consistent, dependable and, above all, faithful and just. In all his dealings with us, God has proven to be completely worthy of our devotion and our trust. It is of tremendous importance to our spiritual sanity to know that God is neither arbitrary nor capricious. He does not do things in one way today and another tomorrow. His deeds do not vary from person to person. He finds no pleasure in either whim or fancy and he does not prompt us to seek what he does not intend to help us find.

So let us move on with this Lent, 1979, in the contemplation of God's abiding presence, confident that what he has done before he is doing now and will continue to do: the same yesterday, today and forever.

*Prayer: Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways. Reclothe us in our rightful mind; in purer lives thy service find; in deeper reverence, praise.**

Forget Not His Benefits

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases . . . (Psalm 103:2-3) Read Psalm 103:1-22

John Donne (1573-1631) took good measurement of our human condition and of God's awareness of it in his *Hymn To God The Father*:

Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which is my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do still: though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin by which I have won
Others to sin? and made my sin their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year, or two: But wallowed in, a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
Shall shine as He shines now, and heretofore;
And having done that, Thou hast done,
I fear no more.

That God forgives all our iniquity is not merely the fact of the matter, it is also a promise. For all who repent there is to be another opportunity, not just for righteousness but also for the companionship of God as we work through the consequences of our unrighteousness. Not by some celestial eraser does God wipe our slate clean, but neither does he forsake us as we seek to make amends. Once we are deeply concerned about a newness of life, we are assured that he will provide the way.

We should never forget that the provision for forgiveness is a clause which God himself has written into his contract with the human family. He knows that being human is like having two strikes against us from the outset. So if at any point along the way we are not what we would be, there is yet the possibility for us to grow in that direction; knowing that God does not hold it against us if we have not quite arrived. If anything, he is more concerned with the direction we choose to go than with how far we have come.

Prayer: Dear God, please be patient with me and present with me as I seek to know, to understand and to do your will.

We, Too, Can Arise

For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plenteous redemption. (Psalm 130:7) Read Psalm 130:1-8

Some years ago when a stretch of land in London was cleared for the building of a new highway, the earth lay exposed to the light and the air for a full year before work was continued. Within that time a strange sight began to draw naturalists to the ruins. Over most of the ground the sun had not shone nor the rain fallen since the Romans first sailed up the Thames and beached upon the strand. When the sunlight poured its rays upon the uncovered soil many new flowers sprang into bloom. Some were unknown in all of England. They were plants the Romans had brought with them. Hidden away in darkness, lying dormant under the mass of bricks and mortar, they seemed to have died. But under new conditions, obeying the law of life, they escaped from their old death and blossomed into new beauty. So it is that after years of wrongdoing, after all that is pure and holy in one's heart seems forever lost, the simplicities and the sanctities and the values of youth may also arise from the dead. We, too, can arise to newness of life!

For this to happen, the requirements are clear: We must recognize that we have not been and are not yet what God intended us to be. We must confess this fact without reservation. We must go far beyond just saying to God that we are "sorry," as if a simple apology were all that is expected. Confession without reservation means that we place ourselves fully at God's disposal, ready and willing for him to take us, to re-make us, to re-mold us—to do with us not what *we* will, but what *he* wills. That puts some teeth into the meaning of repentance!

With no intention of implying an easy, pat answer to a complex question, it is still enough to say that if it is a matter of worthiness that plagues us in relation to our Christian responsibilities, either within the church or out there in the world, then the first step to take is in dealing with our *unworthiness*. That means turning all of life over to God—the good as well as the bad and the indifferent—confident that as we are sincere about not being led into temptation and about being delivered from evil, so will God be sincere in his efforts to aid our highest aspirations.

Prayer: Help me O God, as I seek to be counted on the side of truth and beauty and goodness and love.

He Is Faithful and Just

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) Read 1 John 1:1-10

One of our most difficult spiritual tasks is that of learning to believe in God's forgiveness, to accept it as a viable possibility, to make the leap of faith which says that it is true—even if we do not understand it—and then to live out the rest of our days in the assurance that we do not have to bear intolerable and unmanageable burdens of guilt. Needless to say, there is no easy forgiveness. We can describe it as the conscious act of laying aside all intent of retribution or revenge, but no dictionary definition can ever suffice to tell us of the length and breadth and height and depth to which true forgiveness is willing to go. Indeed, without the vision of the Cross we might never fathom the extent of God's sacrificial, unconditional love at all. It is the purpose of such all-inclusive pardoning of someone's hurtfulness to give everything, to bear everything, so that the wrongdoer may be reinstated to fullness of life. Only God can do that work for humanity. But as God forgives at his level, so must we respond with the most forgiveness we can manage at our own.

With whom shall I find perfect ease
To whom draw near
Undaunted by the shadow of offense,
The shade of fear?

The dearest eyes that beam down into mine
In love and trust,
Light up the motes of infidelities,
My heart's rank dust.

Did those eyes penetrate, they could at best
Be sadly kind,
Might tolerate but never purge away
What they must find.

But God who sees it all can cleanse it all,
So my heart shows
To men a stagnant pool, to Him a stream
Still clearing as it flows.*

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for bearing with me at my worst while still prompting me to be my best.

**Anna Bunston deBarry*

The Beggar's Refuge

... be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32) Read Ephesians 4:25-32

In his play, *Major Barbara*, George Bernard Shaw has a character say that, "Forgiveness is the beggar's refuge . . . because we must all pay our debts." So it is when we pray that God will, "... forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," because we are incapable of overcoming the consequences of our own wrongdoing. We may live at our best today, but that does not cancel out our having lived at less than our best yesterday. The consequences of yesterday's sin, be that sin one of commission or of omission, go on just the same. As ink poured into a glass of water, as ripples emanating from a pebble dropped into a pond, we cannot call those consequences back and have things appear as if there had been no sin. Nor can we rub them out and have our life's slate appear as if there had never been a blot or blemish upon it. Mankind has surely learned by now that we mere mortals cannot cleanse history. We cannot wipe away memory. No one has the power to return to the past, much less to change it. When our worst has already set dire results in motion there is simply no way to prevent their continued motion, regardless of how our best may be applied the following day or on all the days thereafter. Forgiveness is the beggar's refuge because otherwise we have no currency with which to pay our debts. Only God can ever make right the wrong we perpetrate and it is only to him that we may turn.

My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So, turning gloomily from my fellow-men
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burial place;
Where, pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of our common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and trembling, I
forgave!*

Prayer: O thou Great Forgiver, help me to forgive even as I have been forgiven; not to win laurels, but to pay my debts!

*John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

A New Beginning

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10) Read Psalm 51:1-19

Quite often these days we run across the expression, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." It is so true that it may not be new at all. Surely it must have occurred to someone in every generation. But the implication is clear. The past is over and done with. We cannot call it back to do anything about it. But the future has just begun.

In this very instant it is possible to make a new start, a fresh beginning, a complete change from anything that was or has been before. This need not mean some cataclysmic event, some startling conversion experience or some great set of resolutions by which we promise to live from then on. Surely it cannot mean some "operation bootstrap" by which we are determined to perform acts of cleansing and renewal all by ourselves—we've tried that already! What the hope of new beginning does mean is that daily, hourly, minute by minute, we are given a new chance—and we will get much farther in its fulfillment if we remember that it is God's good pleasure to give us that chance. He does not expect us to achieve the newness alone. He is more than anxious to walk with us in whatever better paths we choose. Again, behind this idea of newness of life must lie our acceptance of God's forgiveness, of his willingness and ability to put new and right spirits within us. For to move out in a new way on a new day is out of the question if we are required to carry with us all the burdens of conscience imposed by our past mistakes. But with God we are free to go in the new way full of hope, full of promise, full of joy.

It is part of the genius of the Christian faith that it promises not only the chance for change and newness, but that it also helps to provide the tools whereby they may be fashioned. When we turn from a self-centered to a God-centered, Christ-centered way, everything changes because *we* have changed. We see more clearly, we think more honestly, we begin to shape a new environment through the giving of ourselves toward meeting the needs of other persons. Life takes on a whole new direction and dimension. For this, acceptance of God's forgiveness is the prime prerequisite. Believe it. It works. God is able to do more than you think. Ask him.

Prayer: I ask you, O God, to lead me in a new way. Your way. Beginning this day.

When the Lost Is Found

... for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:32) Read Luke 15:11-32

Saint Augustine wrote of how much more we care for a thing which has been ours after we have lost it and found it again. If this be true concerning a material possession temporarily misplaced, then what of a person whom we have loved, whose friendship we cherished and from whom we have become estranged? Without attempting to see through all of Jesus' insights in the parable of the Prodigal Son, let's agree that no human parent ever loves a child more than when either son or daughter is in serious trouble. It is then the purpose and the work of love to first, be highly visible and second, to abide for as long as need be until the child is no longer in whatever the difficulty may have been.

Surely God's love works toward us with this same purpose. If we would know what God is like, then we should see him as behaving (albeit on a far higher level) as does the human father or mother; so delighted to have found the child that was lost that the circumstances of the lostness are as nothing when compared with those of the foundness. Ultimately they are forgotten because forgiveness has wiped them aside. Such love and generosity many people have difficulty believing, much less accepting. But once the individual walks toward God in the expectation and trust that his forgiveness is both real and complete, it becomes believable and acceptable.

Jesus made it abundantly clear in parable after parable, in example after example, that the shepherd has a new link with the sheep that was lost and is found again. There is a whole new relationship, a whole new experience, a whole new story to be told, because the lost that is found is more his than ever before. Just so when *we* are forgiven we are God's again. We are more his than ever before and his heart as well as ours rejoices! What our Lord taught and what Augustine explained has been the experience of the strayed and the lost in every generation since, including our own. Assured of how faithful and just is God the Father, it will be so for all generations yet to come. When God's help is sought, when his terms are met, we have not won just half the battle but *all* of it.

Prayer: When I wander into the far country, O God, seeking the devices and desires of my own heart, call me back, welcome me, that I may be yours again and wander no more.

Looking for Bargains

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24) Read Psalm 139:1-24

It has taken many centuries for people to learn that we cannot deal with God strictly on our own terms. We still try to decide what we might do to please him rather than to make intelligent responses to the indications he has already given. Suppose we are conscience-stricken over some mistake we have made; having done what we ought not to have done, or leaving undone what we should have done. Our most natural inclination is to try to strike a bargain with God. Instead of asking his help in giving up our sin, we prefer to make amends, balance the scale, put balm on conscience, all at the least possible cost. Perhaps by giving a few dollars to some worthy cause in place of giving in to what we know are more divine expectations. It's like saying, "I don't really want to make any changes, God, but I'll tell you what I'm willing to do instead. You'll like what I've decided to do as soon as you find out what it is!" Isn't it the same with the thoughts and attitudes and prejudices that get in the way of right relationships with other persons? "I'll do most anything, Lord, but please don't make me admit I was wrong."

The fool who says in his heart, "There is no God," or who would reduce his expectations to nothingness, or who would do just as he pleases and be accountable to no one but himself, and who would discount God's power and flaunt his truth has simply failed to read the right words. For there is no corner of this morally governed universe where anyone can escape the eye of God. That eye is not trained upon us to "spy," to see if we are having any fun so as to put a stop to it, to catch us in some act that will give reason for punishment. No! The eye of God is trained upon us because it is the eye of love, seeing that we are in constant need of an open, honest relationship with him if ever we are to be made whole. So let that eye be the veritable "Hound of Heaven," searching us out, finding us where and as we are. Only thus can we be led from our ways into God's ways when differences of purpose exist between them. And we should be grateful for the leading!

Prayer: Spy on me, God. I need watching. But let me not fear to be found out when I know that you will deal with me with loving kindness and tender mercy.

Privilege and Responsibility

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16) Read Hebrews 4:11-16

One of the questions which should boggle the mind of any sensitive person concerns the fact that we who are partakers of western civilization have so large a share of material, cultural and spiritual opportunities which so many of God's children will never know of to any comparable extent. While we may never have a satisfactory answer and perhaps are not supposed to have it, it is certainly true that the favors and blessings are in large measure the result of the sheer accident of our birth: that we were born when and where and to whom we were. The favors and blessings are not meant to indicate that we are the more worthy or deserving. We have done little or nothing of and by ourselves to earn or to merit the multitude of good gifts showered upon us. Our good fortune is in no way related to God's having singled us out as his "special" children; surely not when we know that God loves all mankind with an equal love and never shows partiality. Try as we may, there is no accounting for our lot except to see it as the grace of God!

The long, difficult spiritual pilgrimage which has engaged so many minds and hearts sheds some light on how Christians are to respond to life's mysteries, including the discrepancies and the disproportions just referred to. We are to accept the mysteries as part of God's grace. We are to go about our living without undue concern over our lack of answers to them. We are to rejoice in the fact that God's having all the answers is sufficient for us. Most of all, we are to respond to his abounding love with the best ways and means we can discover. It is a major insight of our Christian heritage that with privilege goes responsibility—the responsibility to share. Out of the abundance of our resources we are to share all that we can with anyone less fortunate whatever be their need! We put it all in the proper context as we recall these words:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that
saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

Prayer: God, you know that I am not very much and that I have no good reason to be proud of the quality of my life or of the kinds of gifts I give. But since all that I am and all that I have are by your grace, help me to give as freely as I have received.

All Things Come of Thee

Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17) Read James 1:16-27

In one of the prayers for the dedication of an offering (which always implies the dedication of our lives as well) there is this classic phrase: "All of the gold and the silver are thine, O Lord; and the cattle upon a thousand hills are thine; and the world is thine; and *we* are thine . . ." That doesn't leave a lot that isn't God's, does it? There is no mention of the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, or the crops in the farmer's field, but these too belong to God because they are part of the "world" the prayer includes.

What all of this calls for is not just our *use* of the several worlds we are privileged to enjoy and for whatever purpose we may choose, but our *response* to them. We do not take them for granted. We humbly acknowledge that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. As we seek to determine why we are here and what we are supposed to be doing, we will fulfill our best capacities and abilities in those places where we have the most to learn and the most to contribute. This is precisely what God's grace demands even though he puts no direct nor special price upon it.

The most enviable persons I know are those who sooner or later discover that special "world" wherein they feel most comfortably active: doing something they like to do, doing something they can do well, doing something they know will make a real difference in the quality of life for themselves and for others. If we were wiser than we seem to be we would provide every young person both time and direction toward these ends, helping them to invest the best gifts God has bestowed upon them in the most productive and enriching ways. Everyone has a right to feel that such investment will leave the world a better place in which to live, less so if they do not make it. Even that choice is a response to the grace of God, for whatever we have of time or talent or treasure still belongs to him. We *are* his and what we become is meant to be to his glory.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to know that how I live my life is as important as how I make my living. May I use all your gifts in ways well-pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

The Heavens Above—The Earth Beneath

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1) Read Psalm 19:1-14

One of the most popular contemporary authors is a Scotch veterinarian with more than 30 years of practice in the Yorkshire dales of north central England. Taking his titles from a poem of Cecil Alexander, (1823-1895) he has published *All Creatures Great And Small*, *All Things Bright And Beautiful*, and most recently, *All Things Wise And Wonderful*. The theme running through these volumes is that if eyes and ears and hearts and minds are properly attuned, we discover that the richest things in all creation: love of family and friends, opportunities for service in situations of need, the beauty of earth and sky and sea and hills, are all available for the taking and the looking and the feeling. In other words (except perhaps for some moderately expensive travel) no one has yet to put a price on any of the things which comprise God's greatest gifts.

It sometimes takes the keen insight of an animal doctor on his daily rounds to remind us that we may take the facets of God's grace far too much for granted. Because the love and the service opportunity and the glory of nature are always there, we often postpone relating to them, believing that there is always tomorrow. That is generally true. But think how much more aware and responsive we would be if we knew that on a certain tomorrow the person to whom we would give our love will not be alive, or that the service we planned to render has been met by someone else, or that either eye or ear will no longer function to appropriate or appreciate beauty as before! Would we not then leap at the chance to embrace what we now let pass by as a matter of course?

Likewise, we are prone to feel that we must go far afield to find joy and beauty when most of what we seek is in our own back yard. Why envy one who is free to visit New England, or the great northwoods of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota when the fall colors are at their peak? Should we not be content with the loveliness that is in Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois? History, biography and literature are replete with accounts of those disappointed folk who have gone afar in search of dreams and rainbows, only to discover too late that with half the effort they could have found even more where they started.

Prayer: Slow me down, Lord, so that I may see and respond to the evidences of your grace which are right at hand, and then joyfully sing your praise!

What a Friend!

The Lord is near to all that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. (Psalm 145:18) Read Psalm 145:1-21

There was a recent contest in which a British magazine offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of lines submitted were these: "One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable." "One who understands our silence." "A volume of sympathy bound in cloth." "A watch which beats true for all time and never runs down." And the winning definition? "A friend is one who comes in when the whole world has gone out!"

Think how well most of these apply, not just to other persons (although they certainly do) but especially to God! He is one who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable; one who understands our silence; one who beats true for all time and never runs down; and surely, one who comes in when all the world has gone out! We might easily apply these lines to God's forgiveness, his courage, or his presence. But they apply above all to his grace, again because he gives us so much, supplies our every need, knows what we require without our having to ask or tell him. We find this uniquely expressed in the words of a 19th century poet:

God, You have been too good to me,
You don't know what You've done.
A clod's too small to drink in all
The treasure of the sun.

The pitcher fills the lifted cup
And still the blessings pour,
They overbrim the shallow rim
With cool refreshing store.

You are too prodigal with joy,
Too careless of its worth,
To let the stream with crystal gleam
Fall wasted on the earth.

Let many thirsty lips draw near
And quaff the greater part!
There still will be too much for me
To hold in one glad heart.*

Prayer: Lord, let the memory of your great goodness keep my trust in you alive. When I encounter tomorrow's need, may yesterday's grace confirm my faith.

**Charles Worton Stork*

Miracles

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4) Read Psalm 8:1-9

Joan Bel-Geddes counseled her skeptical sister, "I know there are many people who are convinced that God actually knows them and loves them and looks after them individually. If them, why not me too? Maybe they know something I don't."

Those many people are more than we could possibly count, considering all the ages that have already come and gone. But we have their testimony concerning deeply personal relationships with God. Not on a one-time basis toward which they could always look back, but an all-time basis toward which they could always look forward. It is this company of witnesses by which we are yet so greatly surrounded that inspires us to ask, "If them, why not me too? Maybe they know something I don't."

It is part of the amazingness of God's grace that he cares for us, is mindful of us in the exact same ways and to the very same degree as for all our fathers before us. We should accept these facts just as they are, even if they are past all our finding out. Why must we think that things can have little meaning or value unless they are terribly complicated? When I hear my friends speak of miracles they seem to think only of the out-of-the-ordinary and the incomprehensible when, by God's grace, they are surrounded by miracles every moment of their lives!

Ponder these lines of Walt Whitman's, and put all your doubts to shame:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-
work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of
sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the
parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn
all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head
surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger
sextillions of infidels.

Prayer: Help me to see your miracles in the life of every day, O God, and to admit the awe, the wonder, the majesty of your works and of your ways.

Strangers and Exiles

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)
Read Hebrews 11:1-13

The fullness of God's grace has been best known to those who have believed two things about him: that he *is*, and that he is *able*. Only then have they discovered that he also rewards those who seek him. A familiar hymn echoes this theme:

Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove.*

It is in such ways that we affirm God's willingness to respond to all who trust him enough to ask of him. Faith becomes more than mere belief. It becomes a guiding force in our lives, challenging us to move out in new directions, to assume new responsibilities, to embark on new ventures, to give ourselves to new causes, to make ourselves available for helping to meet new needs. Not because we are certain of the outcome but because we have trusted that the directions, responsibilities, ventures, causes and needs were all a part of what God wants and expects us to do. It is one thing to sit around embracing our faith as an assurance that God is mindful of *us* and cares for *us*. It is something quite different to get up and to move out where our faith directs, as proof that *we* care about God.

There is nothing in the Christian tradition that assures us of God's grace apart from our caring for the needs of other persons—something the parable of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-45) makes unmistakably clear. If we are unwilling to take risks, to make sacrifices, to endure hardships on the basis of what we believe about God and of what we know to be the needs of other persons, then whatever we experience can only be "cheap grace," worth no more than what it costs!

Prayer: Make me to be of that brave company, O God, who dared trust in your bidding even when they had no proof of what their reward would be, if any. In all that I think and speak and do, help me to be true to that heritage.

*Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)

The Seeker and the Sought

Three times I besought the Lord about this . . . but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:8-9) Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-12

When we stand beside an open grave it is most appropriate to begin the committal service with these marvelous words which St. Paul borrowed from Isaiah: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him." (Isaiah 64:4, I Corinthians 1:9) This says something very positive about God's grace, about his promises yet to be fulfilled in terms of love and care and concern in the hereafter. It says to the bereaved that God is capable of far more than ever we could ask or think and that we are truly committing the spirit of the deceased into hands far stronger and more capable than our own—where, of course, it has always been.

We need to remember though, that all of this is equally possible in the here and the now. Our eyes have yet to see, our ears have yet to hear, our minds and hearts have yet to discover all that God is willing and able to give those who approach him in love and adoration! The central fact of worship is not so much that we are seeking God as that he is seeking us. Turning to Isaiah once more, we find God saying, "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation that did not call on my name." (65:1) And again, "Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear." (65:24)

When God's willingness and ability to give is met by receptive and responsive hearts, when he comes to our aid with all the grace we can ever need, when we reach out to him in praise and thanksgiving, in confession and petition; when our souls hunger and thirst after him, when they long for him and wait for him, things happen! What happens is simply that his grace is poured out upon us through the sheer force of his love and the presence we sought becomes as real as anything we will ever know! As James put it, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." (4:8) It is here, in this encounter, that we find God's grace quite sufficient for us.

*Prayer: Spirit of God, descend upon my heart. Wean it from earth; through all my pulses move. Stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art, and make me love thee as I ought to love.**

Who Am I?

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:14) Read Romans 8:14-39

Back in the early 1960s, a popular concern among church people was to find an answer to the question, "Who am I?" That question has not left us altogether, but we have made some progress toward an answer. We know we are not fully identified by the name given us at birth or the surname that came with it—hardly a distinguishing characteristic if some other person has exactly the same name! In many cultures it has been customary for a male child to be known as "the son of," meaning that the first and last names together would at least identify one's parentage. In other traditions whole clans of names have come about through occupations, especially when sons followed fathers, generation after generation, in the same trades: such as cooper, miller, carpenter, etc. But the fact is that each of us is much, much more than just the offspring of someone else with a given name, a surname, or a means of livelihood which came about through inheritance.

Who are we? We are sons and daughters and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins and husbands and wives and mothers and fathers. We are also who we are through a multitude of relationships with other folk experienced through education and training, to say nothing of all the others encountered wherever we have lived and moved and had our being. None of these factors can be left out of our personal equation. In our highly mobile society an "I. D." card is almost a necessity for anyone: driver's license, Social Security card, bank account number, or whatever. But when I am asked for one of these I want to say, "That's not really telling you who I am! I am a person with more than a name and a number! I have a wealth of relationships and background and education and experience. But I am more than all of these put together and to know the *real* me you would have to learn of me through long personal contact. Even then I would probably hide a lot of things about myself for fear that you would like me less if you knew of them." Suffice it to say that we are all children of God. That is the very most any of us can claim as our identity. All the rest is meaningless and insignificant if we leave that out!

Prayer: You are the best relative I have, O God. Help me to be justly proud of being your child and to know that because you are my Father, your grace will always be sufficient for me.

Be of Good Courage

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:14) Read Psalm 27:1-14

Far beyond his forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, God has consistently provided courage for all who trust him, especially in their struggles for justice and peace; as with our fathers before us, so in our own time.

Robert Louis Stevenson observed that the world has no room for cowards; that we must all be ready somehow to toil, to suffer, to die; “. . . and your (courage) is no less noble because no drum beats before you as you go out to your daily battlefields, and no crowds shout your coming when you return from your daily victory and defeat.” Winston Churchill wrote, “Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all the others.” John F. Kennedy pointed out that to be courageous requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place or circumstance. The stories of past courage can define ingredients, they can teach, they can offer hope, they can provide inspiration, but they cannot supply courage itself. For this each person must look into his own soul and to his own God. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of courage as one’s “. . . resolution to go forward in spite of obstacles and frightening situations; it breeds creative self-affirmation; it faces fear and masters it; but cowardice is the submissive surrender to circumstance. “We must,” he said, “constantly build dykes of courage to hold back the flood of fear.”

The world is so filled with the attitudes and actions of courage that we never need look far to discover someone great or small whose life is an inspiration to all of us who fear. The people of courage whom it has been my privilege to know have never claimed that they were not afraid. They simply went ahead to be and to do what they knew was necessary whether they were afraid or not! Karle Wilson Baker, whom we need not remember for any other reason, said it best: “Courage is armor a blind man wears; the calloused scar of outlived despairs; courage is fear that has said its prayers.”

Prayer: Deliver me, O God, from faithless fears. It is the new, the strange, the different and the unknown that I fear most. Help me to remember that my times are in your hands and then to go forward unafraid.

Count Me In!

Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10) Read Isaiah 41:1-10

Whether or not we ever fully conquer our fears, our best response to God's forgiveness and grace is in terms of how we seek to meet the needs of other persons, especially those whose difficulties are not of their own making and are so often the result of circumstances beyond their control. To thus answer God's call we must first rid ourselves of the foolish notion that since we are but single individuals we have nothing significant to contribute. To any who fall back upon this outworn excuse God's courage will not be available. If we aren't doing anything constructive we don't need it and we don't deserve it!

Bonaro Overstreet addressed himself to those who doubt the worth of doing anything if they can't do everything: "You say the little efforts that I make will do no good; they never will prevail to tip the hovering scale where Justice hangs in balance. I don't think I ever thought they would. But I am prejudiced beyond debate in favor of my right to choose which side will feel the stubborn ounces of my weight."

We need to remember that our "stubborn ounces," added to those of other like-minded persons, may soon make up several pounds and that where great issues are at stake, even several tons to "tip the hovering scale"!

Believing that the Christian is to be a co-creator with God, Susan Coolidge (1845-1905) wrote,

One small life in God's great plan,
How futile it seems as the ages roll,
Do what it may, or strive how it can,
To alter the sweep of the infinite whole!
A single stitch in an endless web,
A drop in the ocean's flow and ebb!
But the pattern is rent where the stitch is lost,
Or marred where the tangled threads have crossed;
And each life that fails of its true intent
Mars the perfect plan that its Maker meant.

Prayer: Where I would count myself out, will you, Lord, count me in! Forgive my feeble excuses for staying out of the fray and forbid that I should ever say, "I don't want to get involved."

Great Winds from the Sky

*From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2) Read Psalm 121*

During Lent and Holy Week, and especially on Good Friday, we sing Ferdinand Blanchard's words to the hymn tune *St. Christopher*:

The hopes that lead us onward,
The fears that hold us back,
Our will to dare great things for God,
The courage that we lack,
The faith we keep in goodness,
Our love, as low or pure.
On all, the judgment of the cross
Falls steady, clear, and sure.

At no point in life does that judgment fall more surely than when it comes to "... our will to dare great things for God." We *know* what the great things are; but we put off doing them until a more "convenient" time. We look for dares that do not involve risk. We pretend that it won't really make any difference if we do nothing. Worst of all, we lack the confidence that tells us that when we are on God's side, when we are about our Father's business, we are not alone!

More than 40 years ago, Amelia Earhart was lost at sea while attempting a 'round the world flight. When it became apparent that she would never be found alive, Walter Lippmann wrote, "The world is a far better place in which to live because there are people who will give up ease and security and risk their lives to do what they themselves believe worth doing. They do the useless, brave, noble, the divinely foolish and the very wisest things ever done by man. And what they prove, to themselves and others, is that man is no mere creature of his habits, no automaton reacting to the circumstances around him, but that in the dust of which he is made there is also fire, lighted now and then, by great winds from the sky."

Lippmann would not have contended that Miss Earhart was necessarily "about her Father's business," but all that her risk-taking moved him to say is nevertheless true. Particularly for the Christian is it true that what seems "divinely foolish" may turn out to be precisely what God would desire.

Prayer: Dear God, I do believe that in the dust of which I am made there is also fire. Light me up by the presence and power of your Spirit—by your great winds from the sky.

Who Is My Neighbor?

Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? (Luke 10:36) Read Luke 10:29-37

It is far too easy to misinterpret many of Jesus' words to the point where we may believe that we are to do a right thing in order that we may be rewarded. Conservative theology tends to put an overwhelming emphasis on our "being good" if God is to be good to us. On the contrary! Whatever we are moved to seek of goodness and mercy and justice and peace or to do about securing them for others, should come about in response to the goodness of God we have *already* received! It follows then that an awareness of those blessings poured out in our behalf should call forth both a recognition of and a concern for those whose circumstances deprive them of any opportunity to develop their God-given capacities to the fullest possible extent—to the end that they may know the same rich and abundant life that is ours. As Kahlil Gibran put it, "Through the hands of such as these God speaks, and from behind their eyes he smiles upon the earth."

Woe to him who has not known the woe of man,
Who has not felt within him burning all the want of
desolated bosoms since the world began;
Felt, as his own, the burden of the fears that daunt;
Who has not eaten failure's bitter bread, and been
Among those ghosts of hope that haunt the day,
unseen.

Only when we are hurt with all the hurt untold, —
In us the thirst, the hunger, and ours the helpless
hands,
The palsied effort vain, the darkness and the
cold,—
Then, only then, the Spirit knows and understands,
And finds in every sigh breathed out beneath the
sun
The human heart that makes us infinitely one.*

Prayer: Most gracious God, may I be so filled with gratitude for your great mercies toward me that I will want to run, literally, to those persons and places where mercies are called for and do all that I can to help provide them.

Gongs and Cymbals

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1) Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

God does not call us into his church merely to deplore the fact of evil or to wring our hands in desperation over it or to talk about how bad it is as if that were enough to make it go away. It is, rather, the better part of Christian statesmanship to confront falsehood with the claims of truth, oppression with the claims of justice, hurt with the claims of healing, hatred with the claims of love. Otherwise the evils we deplore simply gain strength and, without such confrontation, ultimately win out—although it is surely a part of God's purpose in Christ to show that they ultimately *lose*! How soon they lose and how badly depends to a great extent on the force of our Christian witness.

The late Truman B. Douglass, regarded by some of us as one of the leading Christian statesmen of our time, put this as well as could be: "The outcries of those who are forever pleading that the church confine itself to spiritual matters . . . that it stay out of politics and economics and civil rights and public affairs generally . . . are becoming more and more absurd. Christianity knows nothing of 'pure' spirituality. There is no such thing as justice apart from *doing justly*. There is no such thing as mercy apart from *merciful deeds*. There is no such thing as love apart from *loving somebody*, and in specific, concrete ways. Christianity understood as being addressed only to men's 'spirits' is nonsense."

The church's record in the public arena is somewhat spotty because it has not always been in the forefront of those efforts whereby justice and mercy and love have been increased. But think what kind of world we would have today if Christian statesmen had not been there at all! The fellowship of the local congregation is still the best place in society for us to discover what the love of God is really like and to have our moral and spiritual wounds bound up. But it is likewise the best place to *go from*, to do that loving which God commands and which our world so desperately needs. We should not need to be reminded that anything which affects the lives of persons, for good or for ill, is a legitimate concern of the Christian faith.

Prayer: Lord, let me not take my religion lying down. Just as you lure me into the church to find your love, push me into the world where I may give it.

Call to the Kingdom

And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14) Read Esther 4:1-17

History and literature are filled with insights regarding those attitudes the times seem to determine. Shakespeare wrote of how the time was out of joint and of “what cursed spite” one felt that he “was born to set it right.” Emerson reminded his neighbors in Concord that their time, like any time, was a good time, if they but knew what to do with it. Dickens introduced his *Tale Of Two Cities* by remarking that the late 1780s represented both the best of times and the worst of times. Robert Shirley founded a church in the Cromwellian regime whose singular praise it was “to have done the best things in the worst times and to have hoped them in the most calamitous.” And it was Thomas Paine who stated (December 19, 1776) that his were the “times that try men’s souls”—though the record shows that he and his contemporaries did much more than just twiddle their thumbs. They went about the business of forging a new nation on an anvil which still requires our beat!

With weird logic and wasted effort and a lot of wishful thinking we sometimes speculate as to which time, other than our own, we might have preferred to live. In much the same way we debate the question of whether the times help create the leadership they require or if God doesn’t have some way of raising up special men and women at just the right time to help save the day. Such mental exercise may have its place, but the fact remains that you and I have no real choice in the matter of when. The “when” is *now*. So engage in nostalgia, long for the good old days, (which may not have been half so good as we think) or complain that everything nailed down is coming loose. Who knows whether *we* have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? And since we have no way to determine otherwise, we had best make the most of the times that are ours and in whatever ways it seems God would have us do so. Someone was recently asked the difference between ignorance and apathy, to which he replied, “I don’t know, and I don’t care!” There is, Lord knows, far too much ignorance and apathy which have become characteristic of our day. But over against such, the Christian must devote all the best resources his heritage provides. We won’t get another chance!

Prayer: Make me content, Lord, with the time in which I find myself; not longing for another. But forbid that I should let contentment make for complacency. There is surely much that you can point me to that will help improve the time.

History Teaches Hope

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
(Romans 15:13) Read Romans 15:1-13

It may help us to make the most and the best of our time if we can look at life from a truly long-range perspective; not to minimize our responsibility for justice and peace but to increase our understanding of who is ultimately in charge here. It does no harm to pray as if it were all up to God, or to work as if it were all up to us. We just need to know that all is not necessarily lost if all the work is not finished before we die. Reinhold Niebuhr was quite correct in stating that nothing which is worth doing can be fully achieved in our lifetime and therefore we must be saved by hope. Yet time and again we encounter those who are afraid to let go of some cause or purpose which has intrigued them and commanded their best efforts for most of their lives. They stay on the job long after their effectiveness has diminished to nothingness. They refuse to retire. They are convinced that they are indispensable and they lack whatever hope could assure them that others can be trusted to take up the banner after they put it down.

I like what Robert E. Lee wrote about this and so will you. "My experience of men has neither disposed me to think worse of them nor indisposed me to serve them; not, in spite of failures which I lament, of errors which I now see and acknowledge, or of the present aspect of affairs, do I despair of the future. The truth is this: The march of Providence is so slow and our desires so impatient; the work of progress is so immense and our means of aiding it so feeble; the life of humanity is so long and that of the individual so brief, that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave and are thus discouraged. It is history that teaches us to hope."

We need know but little about Lee's life to realize that he lived by every word of this faith in the few years remaining to him after bitter defeat.

Prayer: Keep me humble, Lord. Spare me from becoming arrogant because of what you enable me to do and from that sense of self-importance which makes me think that I am the only one who can be so used.

Hang in There!

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62) Read Luke 9:51-62

Granted that we are not indispensable and that we are never so important as we are inclined to think, there is yet a sense in which the Christian has no business engaging in a task which he does not intend to finish, especially if that task involves humanity's struggles for justice and peace. Earlier on, I have implied that the Christian is one who strives to live according to the manner and spirit of Jesus, the Christ, and that such striving is characterized by a willingness to take risks, to make sacrifices, and to endure hardships, all on the basis of and in response to what he believes about the ways and the love of God. In today's scripture our Lord makes it abundantly clear that there is a cost to discipleship and that we may never know how high the cost will be until the task is finished. Furthermore, there is not a word in the New Testament to suggest that the Christian life can be lived either at ease or on the individual's own terms! Yet churches are full of folk who have never understood the demands and the rigors that may follow one's answer to God's call. We have made it too easy for them to get in and every year names must be removed from membership rolls because the people bearing those names have opted to leave. Not because they were mad or because someone hurt their feelings but only because it turned out that more was expected of them than they had "bargained" for.

The joys of discipleship can turn out to be the biggest bargain life will ever bring. But those joys do not come easily or just because we are assured of God's love. It cannot be said too often that knowing that love, experiencing it, having it sustain us when things are at their worst and inspire us when they are at their best, *must* result in our giving in proportion to what we have received. Our time, talent and treasure in support of the institution of that local church to which we belong, is but one form of giving. And it may be the least costly. The greater joy comes largely from the giving of ourselves to those persons and those causes which are God's. To be Christian, then, is to offer our backs to the Lord, letting him put the load on them himself and, at the same time, supply all the courage we need.

Prayer: Let me not turn away from that which I have promised to do in your name, O God. Give me the tenacity to keep on trying, even when I know I have failed.

We Labor Not in Vain

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now are they hid from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42) Read Luke 19:28-47

God's promises of courage to all who strive for peace within themselves and throughout the world have been fulfilled time and again as individuals have busied themselves in the sharing of his love, building the bridges of peace from their own doorsteps or in some far corner of the earth. But peace of either kind seems highly elusive. More people occupy beds in hospitals for the emotionally and mentally ill than in all other hospitals combined. Surely they are not at peace. However old we may be, we have seen wars and heard rumors of wars for the vast majority of our days. Surely the world is not at peace. Are the things that make for peace hid from *our* eyes? I think not. Indeed, the heritage of our faith which tells of the love of God as revealed in Jesus, the Christ, and made manifest throughout his life and ministry, should have more value to us in 1979 than ever before. We *do* know the things that make for peace. It is just a matter of putting them into practice. And we should not lose heart if not everyone is willing to try them or if they sometimes take longer to work out than we would like. Arthur Hugh Clough, (1819-1861) put it like this:

Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labor and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.
If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And but for you, possess the field.
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.
And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright!

While the poet uses one or two martial metaphors, he is neither sanctioning nor glorifying physical combat. He is, rather, appealing for patience. The race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong.

Prayer: Let me never give up my efforts, O God, however feeble they may be, to build the bridges of peace within myself, with my neighbor and with you.

All May Yet Be Well

He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:4) Read Isaiah 2:1-11

Talk about elusive hopes! Isaiah's prophecy has been on the lips of thousands upon thousands for well over 2,500 years—and the nations still expend more of the earth's resources for spears and swords than for feeding the hungry and clothing the naked! They learn more and more of war and of how to wreak havoc and destruction with the passing of each new day. But they do not reckon with the powers of God which he still reserves unto himself. If you despair of peace ever becoming a reality, in your lifetime or beyond, then you may find some consolation, some good reason to renew your hope, in these words of the late Karl Barth:

"What is required of us is that we should be watchful, willing and ready to make Christian decisions in the midst of an evil world. We are not the ones to change this evil world into a good world. God has not resigned his lordship over into our hands. The salvation of the world, which has already been accomplished, was not our work. And so also that which still remains to be done—the revealing of the world's salvation in a new heaven and a new earth—will not be our work, but his. All that is required of us is that in the midst of the political and social disorder of the world we will be his witnesses—disciples and servants of Jesus. We shall have plenty for all our hands to do, just being that! It is enough for the disciple that he should be as his lord, and for the servant that he should be as his master."

We may not agree with Barth's theology here. Many would insist that the Christian must be far more an activist. But who can disagree with his view that being witnesses—disciples and servants of Jesus—will give us plenty for all our hands to do? That is one way of saying that all may yet be well and that in God's own time and in his own way, Isaiah's prophecy will come to pass *if* our individual lives are devoted to a sufficient employment of those things we know to make for peace.

Prayer: Keep me from feeling that you have abdicated your responsibilities, O God. Help me to know, rather, that in many situations, you and I together, may constitute a majority.

The Guidepaths to Peace

Not that I complain . . . for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. (Philippians 4:11) Read Philippians 4:1-13

St. Paul wrote more than once of his personal contentment, made possible, no doubt, because he could rejoice in what God had called him to be and to do. Also because he looked forward, as did all first century Christians, to the imminent return of him who was to rule forever in his new kingdom. When it comes to that inner peace of mind and heart and spirit which we so covet for ourselves and which yet seems to defy all our effort and to forever exceed our grasp, we could take a page from Paul's book, (or his letters) concerning the values of being content with whatever we have. In these matters the world *is* too much with us and we *do* lay waste our powers in gross attention to getting and spending—all in the naive belief that it is *things* that necessarily make for contentment. Contrast our feverish struggle with these lines from the pen of Henry van Dyke:

“Be glad of life because it gives you a chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars; to be satisfied with your possessions but not content with yourself until you have made the best of them; to despise nothing in the world except falsehood and meanness, and to fear nothing but cowardice; to be governed by your admirations rather than by your disgusts; to covet nothing that is your neighbor's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manners; to think seldom of your enemies, often of your friends, and every day of Christ; and to spend as much time as you can with body and spirit in God's out-of-doors—these are the guidepaths to peace.”

I don't know how many years it took van Dyke to arrive at this great philosophy, but how marvelous it would be if we could all have it at the outset! As the Amish say, we are “too soon old, and too late smart” and we could take a page or two from *their* book concerning how contentment with a simple way of life, an existence unhampered by the tyranny of things, can be the basis for an inner peace.

Prayer: Help me to keep my sanity, Lord, in a world that constantly bombards me with false notions of how to have it made. Help me, too, to take time for more reflection on those things of yours that truly abide.

Is It Good for Children?

Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14) Read Mark 10:13-22

Most children are far more peaceful, far more *at peace*, than are most adults. You might claim that if this be so it is only because children do not yet have adult responsibilities. They are insulated and isolated and protected from the kinds of harsh realities which so plague their elders. Maybe so. But they nevertheless exhibit a degree of trust in other persons and in the world around them which is to be envied; partly because that trust seems to be so natural. How do we lose that innate sense of security, of peace, as we grow older? Do we not perhaps have something important to learn as we watch and listen to the child? In terms of peace and the things that *make* for peace and what it means to be *at peace*, children provide us with both precept and example.

George Wald, Harvard biologist and Nobel Laureate, (1967) writes, "Is it good for children? Test everything you do, everything you believe in, by this yardstick. If it is good for children, then do it. If it is not good for children, then don't do it." This takes care of hatred and division and discord and prejudice and pollution and poverty and war and just about everything else the Christian should be concerned about. If none of these things is good for children, or for any other living things, then our responsibility is to help alleviate them, beginning, of course, with whatever part of them may be in our own minds and hearts and lives.

Eugene O'Neill, in *The Great God Brown*, has Brown, the central character, lying dead in the street. A policeman bends over his body and asks, "Well, what's his name?" Someone replies, "Man." Then the policeman, notebook and pencil in hand, demands: "How do you spell it?" Obviously, if our dreams of peace for the human family are ever to become realities, then we must learn not just how to spell "Man," but to read into that simple word all the aspirations God has implanted in all persons. To ask, "Is it good for children?", just might be a good point at which to start the lesson.

Prayer: Lord, I don't quite know what happened to my child-like faith, but I would certainly appreciate your help in getting some of it back again. Perhaps we can begin by ridding my mind and heart of all the adult clutter that is both superficial and unnecessary.

Creative Tension

Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee. (Isaiah 26:3) Read Isaiah 26:1-13

God has placed in our hearts what has often been referred to as a "divine discontent," which is to say that the sensitive person cannot be satisfied until things as they are begin to move toward things as we believe God would have them be. Such is a kind of creative tension—something which has characterized the life and stance of every noble soul the world has yet known. Saints and martyrs were never made from those situations where all was so good that any further striving seemed unnecessary. Indeed, even the common soul would hardly care to live in a world where there was nothing constructive left to be done. So, in those attitudes and actions which bring us closer to a sense of peace within ourselves and to greater harmony within the social order, we have reason to rejoice that some tension yet remains. G. A. Studdert Kennedy, (1883-1929) expressed this very well:

Peace does not mean the end of all our striving,
Joy does not mean the drying of our tears;
Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving
Up to the light where God Himself appears.

Joy is the wine that God is ever pouring
Into the hearts of those who strive with Him,
Light'ning their eyes to vision and adoring,
Strength'ning their arms to warfare glad and grim.

We are not always happy when some responsibility for bringing order out of chaos falls upon our shoulders. But would we, could we, be any happier if such a summons never came? It is simply a fact of life—harsh or exciting, depending on one's point of view—that the task of reconciliation is never finished and that with each new day there is always new opportunity to discover where our efforts are needed and where God can use us all over again. We may hope for and dream about some state of perpetual bliss, but it is very doubtful that we would enjoy it for long. It is the state of perpetual tension between the "is" and the "ought to be" that keeps our hearts beating in tune with the Infinite!

Prayer: I need rest, O God. I need an occasional respite from responsibility that wears my patience thin. But let me never be satisfied to step off life's busy stage and be only a spectator from there on!

Discipline Is Good for Us

Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14) Read Hebrews 12:1-14

Most of us are familiar with a phrase from our Lord's prayer as prayed by a certain Chinese Christian: "Let thy kingdom come, Lord, *beginning with me.*" That not only brings matters close to home, it indicates that there are a great many things which you and I can find to do that will help further God's purposes in simple yet sure and direct ways. Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1855-1919) had deep insight into those ways and means whereby each of us may make a considerable difference for good. She expressed it in what she called, *A Morning Prayer*:

Let me today do something that will take
A little sadness from the world's vast store
And may I be so favored as to make
Of joy's scanty sum a little more.

Let me not hurt, by any selfish deed
Or thoughtless word, the heart of foe or friend;
Nor would I pass, unseeing, worthy need,
Or sin by silence when I should defend.

However meager be my worldly wealth,
Let me give something that will aid my kind—
A word of courage, or a thought of health
Dropped as I pass for troubled hearts to find.

Let me look back across the span
"Twixt dawn and dark, and to my conscience say—
Because of some good act to beast or man—
"The world is better that I lived today."

What a difference for good, for justice, for peace, if each of us could begin each day with such a prayer for God's guidance and direction " 'twixt dawn and dark"! Again, our little contributions may be only weighed in ounces; but if they be "stubborn," if they be determined, if they be placed upon the balance with thoughts of love and joy and peace, then some other life, as well as our own, will be blessed and enriched because we made contact and because we cared. We may not achieve anything significant if left to our own devices, but there is no telling how much good can result if we ask God to use us.

Prayer: I need to be disciplined, O God. Without your help I may just drift to and fro, putting off until some other day what I ought to be doing this day. Help me to see today's opportunities for making the world better and to act while there is time.

Past All Understanding

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

Read Philippians 4:4-13

There are many times when we need to recall how infinitely patient God is; surely far more patient with us than are we with him! In our struggles for justice and peace it is good to know that ". . . a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday . . ." This is not to say that we may take our ease and do nothing and leave it all up to God, but only that we are too prone to discouragement when things do not move swiftly enough for us. These words of Minot Judson Savage (1894-1918) may help greatly to put it all in proper perspective:

How shall come the kingdom holy,
In which all the earth is blest,
That shall lift on high the lowly,
And to weary souls give rest?
Not with trumpet calls of legions
Bursting through the upper sky,
Waking earth through all its regions
With the heaven-descending cry.
Not with dash or sudden sally,
Swooping down with rushing wing;
But, as creeping up a valley,
Come the grasses in the spring;
First one blade and then another
Still advancing are they seen
Rank on rank, each by its brother,
Till every inch of ground is green.
Through the weary days of sowing,
Burning sun and drenching shower,
Day by day, so slowly growing,
Comes the waited harvest hour.
So the kingdom cometh ever,
Though it seems so far away;
Each high thought and true endeavor
Hastens on the blessed day.

*Prayer: Slow me down, Lord. Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind. Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time. Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Break the tension of my nerves with the soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory. Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations to look at a flower, to chat with an old friend or to make a new one; to pat a stray dog; to watch a spider build a web; to smile at a child; or to read a good book. Remind me, each day, that there is more to life than increasing its speed. Let me look up into the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well.**

*Orrin L. Crain

We Live by Hope

... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us. (Romans 5:3-5) Read Romans 5:1-11

Reasonable hopes are always full of possibility for the Christian because he does not exercise those hopes alone. In the early 17th century, St. Francis de Sales wrote, "Do not look forward to the changes and chances of this life in fear; rather look to them with full hope that, as they arise, God, whose you are, will deliver you out of them. He is your keeper. He has kept you hitherto. Do you but hold fast to his dear hand, and he will lead you safely through all things; and, when you cannot stand, he will bear you in his arms. Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow. Our father will either shield you from suffering, or he will give you strength to bear it."

This particular St. Francis was not merely relying on his own experience; he was reflecting upon the lives of innumerable other folk whom he knew had found a hope strong enough to dispel their gravest fears. As John Newton wrote, for one of our favorite spirituals,

"Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home."

Today's scripture provides the greatest assurance we could ever need that God's presence in our trials is readily available to all who trust him and who then ask and seek and knock according to their need. It is essential, however, that we make advance preparation before the trials and testings come, lest we fail to be properly acquainted with the one whose presence and grace we will inevitably require. It is part of the wisdom imparted by the Christian faith to understand that "dangers, toils and snares" do not come only to "other people"; if we live long enough our share, and more, will surely come to us. If we would be armored against them, then today is none too soon to begin.

Prayer: I do not ask any special favors, Lord. I am as human as the next person and when I am honest about it, I know that anything that happens to others can also happen to me. Help me to get so close to you now, that I will not need to shout when I call for your aid.

Sunday, April 1

God Knows What He Is Doing

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28) Read Romans 8:14-39

Sometimes when the chips are down, the best thing we can do is to kneel on them. This is to say that we are often helpless to cope with what life brings. We have no recourse but to put all of our trust in the one who will ultimately help us to overcome whatever it may be that we cannot handle alone. If we can believe that God *does* work for good in everything—especially in those happenings which are completely beyond our understanding—then, at least, we won't waste a lot of time and energy beating our heads against the wall. It is *trust* that makes all the difference!

Whenever I am prone to doubt and wonder,
I check myself, and say, the mighty one
Who made the solar system cannot blunder,
And for the best all things are being done.
He who set the stars on their eternal courses,
Has fashioned this strange earth by some sure
plan.

Bow low,—bow low to those majestic forces,
Nor dare to doubt their wisdom, puny man.

You cannot put one little star in motion,
You cannot shape one single forest leaf,
Nor fling a mountain up, nor sink an ocean,
Presumptuous pigmy, large with unbelief!
You cannot bring one dawn of regal splendor,
Nor bid the day to shadowy twilight fall,
Nor send the pale moon forth with radiance tender;
And dare you doubt the One who has done all?*

Prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to understand the difference.

The Leadings of God

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. (Exodus 13:21)
Read Exodus 13:1-22

Long before we are grown, experience teaches that life is full of detours. It also has its dead ends. Not everything we envision comes to pass. Much of what we hope for turns out to be very different by the time it is fulfilled and many a dream goes forever unrealized. But which would we rather have: a clear blueprint to show how every facet of life is to be built; a script which indicates how every act of life's drama is to be played out; a road map with every highway and byway clearly marked before we begin the journey . . . or the chance for the kinds of surprises that often give the most meaning and significance to our pilgrimage?

It helps to know that God has just as much a hand in the diversions and disappointments as in all that turns out in the way we planned. If we are perceptive enough, we come to understand that God does not say "No!" to one thing without saying "Yes!" to another. He never closes one door without opening another. His leadings always turn out for the best. Hindsight helps us to know that while we did not get to have things *our* way, it was all to the good that we were led to have them *his* way! Like it or not, we eventually learn several things from God's dealings with us; not the least of which are that we are never completely free to call our own shots, that there are no such things as "self-made" persons, and that we are neither the "masters of our fate" nor the "captains of our souls." Far from indicating hopelessness and powerlessness, these facts of life free us to be more and more responsive to a hope, a power, a will much greater than we could ever know in any other way.

Truly, God is a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night to all who give themselves, align themselves, commit themselves to his purposes. The pages of the scriptures, as well as all those of subsequent history, are replete with the "success" stories of those who sought and found God's presence in both trial and rejoicing.

Prayer: I am stubborn, Lord. I still want to have my way in everything I do. That's why I need your guidance and direction—the promptings and the leadings of your spirit. Otherwise, I am sure to miss out on what is best for me and for all those I love.

A Divinity That Shapes Our Ends

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. (Psalm 98:1)
Read Psalm 98:1-9

Often in critical issues and circumstances, even if it be impossible to fully analyze the forces that determine history, men do at least realize that the tilting of the balance came from something other than the human weights that were thrown onto the scales. Victor Hugo, writing in *Les Misérables*, gave supreme expression to this understanding that into the shaping of human events there comes a power higher than any of this world. Speaking of the battle of Waterloo and the defeat of Napoleon, he says that this probably happened because, "On the afternoon of a certain summer's day, a shepherd said to a Prussian in the forest, 'Go this way and not that', and the reinforcements thus failed to arrive in time." But the whole event, as Hugo saw it, was even more majestic: "End of dictatorship. A whole European system crumbled away. Was it possible that Napoleon should have won the battle? We answer No. Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blucher? No. Because of God. Napoleon had been denounced in the infinite and his fall had been decided upon. He embarrassed God. Waterloo was not a battle; it was a change of front on the part of the whole Universe!"

When life presents us with the worst that can happen, when it seems that nothing is going right, when we despair of ever knowing the peace and joy that was once so much a part of our experience, it is of the greatest importance to know that, as Shakespeare put it, "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." In other words, moving in and out of our affairs, in ways that we may never see nor understand, God's hand is still at work. His purposes and intentions for us are good, and there is nothing in all creation that can ultimately defeat them. Whatever the nature of our trials, our frustrations, our disappointments, they will never be so severe that God cannot act in them. Man's adversity is God's opportunity! This, certainly, does not mean that God *needs* evil in order to bring about good—but it assures us that he can use any circumstance for the best.

Prayer: Dear God, you allow many things to happen that I cannot understand. I would not presume to ask for such wisdom as is yours alone. But please keep me from thinking that you deliberately cause difficulties for me, or for any of your children. Help me, rather, to see your hand at work in everything, and thus to increase my trust in your goodness.

We Call for Help

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. (Psalm 107:6) Read Psalm 107:1-43

One of the finest Christians I have ever known was a very poor and virtually illiterate lady who worked three days a week cleaning other people's houses and the rest of the time, except Sundays, caring for the sick who could not afford to hire nurses. Being the only unmarried member of her huge family, Beulah was the one to whom all her brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces turned whenever they were in any kind of trouble. During the years of our association, her family had one tragedy after another and Beulah was always involved in helping to work through the consequences. One day she said to me, "I know the Lord won't put any more on me than I can bear, but sometimes I wish he didn't have such a high opinion of me!" And then she said, "I really shouldn't talk like that, because I never called on him that he didn't answer and I've never needed strength that he didn't supply!" It was Beulah's marvelous faith, tried and tested again and again in the crucibles of bitter experience, that although God does not always deliver us from our distress when we cry to him in our trouble, he never fails to stand alongside us and to give us his courage and strength, his comfort and peace, as we need and ask for them.

It should hardly be necessary to add that Beulah was called on for her help far more frequently than would have otherwise been the case simply because so many folk were aware of how much trouble she had had of her own. She was too humble to think of herself as anything more than his servant; but that was precisely why she was so useful to God as an instrument in his hands!

He cannot heal who has not suffered much,
For only Sorrow sorrow understands;
They will not come for healing at our touch
Who have not seen the scars upon our hands.*

Prayer: Let me so trust the validity of your presence, Lord, that I will not fear anything that life might bring to me. Help me to build a stronger faith that I may bring to life!

Thursday, April 5

What Did You Do?

And the King will answer them "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40) Read Matthew 25:31-46

It is obviously true that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us." St. Paul's words have been borne out in the lives of millions of folk across the centuries. But in terms of servants such as Beulah, God certainly has other purposes to fulfill besides character-building within our individual lives. Not the least of these must be to also equip us with deep sensitivity concerning the needs of others as well as some real ability to help meet them. Today's scripture makes the unmistakable point that when the final measurement of Christian character is taken, it will be determined by what we were led to *do* for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned *because* (if I may say so once more) of what we have believed; not merely on the basis of our belief alone.

I, for one, am extremely grateful that God has let me live long enough to see the day in the local congregation when the minister's role has become that of being an enabler; of standing alongside and providing support and encouragement for lay persons as they discover and carry out ministries of their own, rather than attempting to perform all the ministries himself, as so many of us were trained to think we had to do a generation ago! In our church it is my greatest privilege to "do it myself" in those situations where special training and long experience are called for. But like unto it is the privilege of putting those in need in touch with one or more of those within the fellowship who have known the same need. In such matters the minister's major responsibility, once he has made the situation known, is to get out of the way! It is through multiple sensitivities and multiple abilities that the church's ministry is multiplied.

*Prayer: Gracious Spirit, dwell with me!
I myself would gracious be;
And, with words that help and heal,
Would Thy life in mine reveal;
And with actions bold and meek,
Would for Christ, my Saviour speak.**

**Thomas Toke Lynch, 1818-1871*

Take Up Your Cross

And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Read Luke 9:18-27

If our observance of Lent is not focused upon the Cross and centered around it we will have missed its entire significance. For it was in this one crucial act that God demonstrated, once and for all, what his love is really like and the extent to which it is willing to go. In all of these daily meditations thus far, I have attempted to cite clear and positive examples of the marvelous and often mysterious ways whereby that Love has been made known to others and is yet revealed to us. I have also tried to emphasize that as I understand the Christian faith, it is meaningless to simply "accept" God's love without deliberately seeking ways and means to respond to it—particularly through what we are moved to be and to do in expressing our love for other persons. We all have our own crosses to bear, some far greater than others. But just as one stepped from the throng to help our Lord carry his, so are we to step forth, helping to carry our brother's and sister's loads. There are numerous ways in which to do this: through intercessory prayer, through the material abundance we share with the less fortunate, through our direct, personal involvement in struggles for justice and peace, through weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. But just as nothing in our own experience can equal an awareness of *God's* presence with us, so nothing can ever take the place of *our* presence with neighbor, family member, friend, or stranger; even if there is no specific thing we can do. Just being there is often the best evidence that we care. And if our caring costs us something: time that we would prefer to use in some other way, money that we would rather spend on ourselves, anxiety and apprehension and fear that it bothers us to share, *then* are we taking up our cross, then and *only* then, are we following the Master.

*Prayer: Keep me from bitterness, Lord. It is so easy to nurse sharp, bitter thoughts each dull dark hour. Against self-pity, Man of Sorrows, defend me. With thy deep sweetness and thy gentle power. And out of all this hurt of pain and heartbreak help me to harvest a new sympathy for suffering human kind, a wiser pity for those who lift a heavier cross with Thee.**

God Keeps His Promises

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore. (Psalm 121:8) Read Psalm 121:1-8

What God allows to happen is only disappointing to those who have not learned to understand how and why he acts. By that strange human arithmetic we are inclined to use for our spiritual ledger-keeping, we expect things to be clearly black or white when they are mostly in varying shades of grey. We expect all goodness to be rewarded and all evil to be punished. And when some evil we cannot explain befalls someone else, then, like Job's comforters, we try to figure out what they must have done to bring on punishment. The truth is, of course, that God keeps his own ledgers, and with a divine system of mathematics which we cannot and are not intended to comprehend. In those events which test our faith the really important thing is to understand the difference between what God promises and what he does not. Annie Johnson Flint, (1862-1932) put this into proper perspective in a simple poem it might be wise for all of us to memorize:

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

When the Psalmist wrote of God's promise to "keep" us because he *is* our "keeper," he did not mean to imply *immunity* from trouble, even for the most faithful of persons. Neither did he mean *protection* against life's slings and arrows in the sense that he would ward off all such dangers and difficulties. In the language of the King James Bible the word is *preserve*, meaning to "make safe." God, then, does not promise to *spare* us but to *aid* us—before, during and after each specific portion of our experience, whether that portion be for good or for ill. It is his *presence* at all times and in all places that we are to expect. With that we are assured of his aid in making the best of the worst and the most of the best.

Prayer: Spare me, O God, from trying to believe things about you that are either unreasonable or false. Help me, rather, to learn all I can that is reasonable and true, and then to trust you to know what you are doing, and why, even when I can't understand.

Out of the Mouths of Babes

And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise?'"
(Matthew 21:16) Read Matthew 21:1-17

Before this day is done most of us will have sung a hymn which says,

All glory, laud and honor to thee, Redeemer, King.
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas
ring!

The people of the Hebrews with palms before thee
went;

Our praise and prayer and anthems before thee we
present.

It would thus appear that Matthew's portrayal of the first Palm Sunday came across loudly and clearly to Theodulph of Orleans who wrote those words sometime between 760 and 821 A.D. Loudly, clearly, they still come after another thousand years: not because we build great churches in which to sing them, not because fine pipe organs peal their accompaniment, not because we are so well fit to hail so matchless a king—or to deserve one; but because in each new generation new children come, and as they come they bring a new burst of love and trust and truth to refresh the souls of the rest of us who are, just possibly, too prone to doubt and skepticism and occasional despair—forgetting that we too have read, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise."

Watch. Look. Listen. Learn from one small enough to cradle in your arms or rock upon your knee, that things are not always what they seem and that God can do anything he wants and in any way he chooses!

Hark! how the children shrill and high "Hosanna"
cry;

Their joys provoke the distant sky,
Where thrones and seraphim reply;
And their own angels shine and sing
In a bright ring;

Such young, sweet mirth
Makes heaven and earth
Join in joyful symphony.*

Prayer: Today would be a good time, Lord, for me to get back some of that simple trust and faith I once had as a child; to ponder anew the strength of your everlasting arms.

The Joy of the Lord

These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11) Read John 15:1-17

Lest Lent be done and it be too late to say so, we must share some words, such as those in today's scripture. They assure us that come what may, God wants us to be happy. The promise of his presence is for our times of joy as well as those of sadness or of any difficulty! Why else would he have sent Christ into the world? Why else would our Lord have spoken of that rich and abundant life God desires for us? All of this came home to me amid the ruins of Tintern Abbey as Wordsworth's lines ran through my mind:

"... Nature never did betray the heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege through all the years of this our life, to lead from joy to joy: for she can so inform the mind that is within us, so impress with quietness and beauty, and so feed with lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues, rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men, nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all the dreary intercourse of daily life, shall e'er prevail against us or disturb our cheerful faith, that all which we behold is full of blessings."

Consider, too, the marvelous refrain of van Dyke's *Hymn To Joy*: "All thy works with *joy* surround thee, earth and heaven reflect thy rays, stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise. Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea, chanting bird and flowing fountain call us to *rejoice* in thee . . . well-spring of the *joy* of living, ocean depth of *happy* rest . . . teach us how to love each other, lift us to the *joy* divine . . . mortals join the *happy* chorus which the morning stars began . . . *joyful* music leads us sunward in the triumph song of life."

Speaking of joy and happiness moves me to remind you that our ministries in and through the church are in no wise limited to the struggle for justice and peace, or to the visitation of the sick, or to memorial services for those who have died. The church is likewise that fellowship wherein joys abound and are carefully shared: in the dedication of infants, in the confirmation of youth, in the commitment the wedding ceremony affirms and in all the good things that happen in the lives of those we love and in the celebration of which we are privileged to join!

*Prayer: My God, I thank thee that thou hast made joy to abound; so many gentle thoughts and deeds circling me round, that in the darkest spot of earth some love is found.**

*Adelaide A. Proctor (1825-1864)

The King of Love My Shepherd Is

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1) He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:11) Read Psalm 23:1-6 and Isaiah 40:1-11

You may think it strange that I suggest scripture so close to Easter that we normally associate with the season of Advent. Isaiah's prophecy is instinctively associated with the coming Messiah, but it is directly related to what I have been saying about God's presence in trial and rejoicing.

There are many images of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is portrayed as a rugged product of the carpenter's shop, as one who could cope with a big fisherman and win his ultimate allegiance, as one who flew in the face of evil to drive money-changers from the temple and as one who never shirked hard responsibility once he had set his face toward Jerusalem. So he was. But there is also the Jesus who calmed the fears of the disciples, who was concerned to feed the hungry multitude, who went out of his way to heal the sick and who enjoyed the social occasion of a wedding feast. Find and claim and rejoice in your own image of what he is like for you!

However the picture turns out, we can hardly deny that we are all subject to those situations in which only the gentle leader will suffice. Just as it is neither sin nor shame to be the victim of loss and pain and grief—events over which we so often have no control—so is it neither sin nor shame to call upon one who will gather us in his arms and carry us in his bosom. All of us who have been so gathered and so carried in our times of deepest distress would choose none other than such a shepherd. Those who would reject this image altogether do so only because they have not yet needed the arm or the bosom. But, when the time comes, as for most it surely will, the one who feeds and gathers and carries and gently leads will not only be welcome, but the only means of saving grace that can be known. He perfects our weakness in his strength!

*Prayer: Grant me thy peace throughout my earthly life, my balm in sorrow, and my stay in strife. Then, when thy voice shall bid my conflict cease, call me, O Lord, to thine eternal peace.**

Instruments of Peace

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:23) Read Matthew 25:14-29

Just as God seeks to use us to be of help to others in their times of trial—bearing one another's burdens—so does he want us to be partakers in and providers of one another's joy. We do not put our faith to work for very long before we learn that one of our greatest joys is to be found in bringing happiness to someone else. If that happiness be brought to one who would not have any at all were it not for us, then is our joy multiplied a hundredfold. The only good reason under the sun for having more than we need is to be able to share with one who has less than he or she needs, and even if we have but one talent, that one can be as useful as we let God make it!

If I can lead a man who has been blind
To see the beauty in a blade of grass;
If I can aid my fellow-men to find
The friendliness of trees they daily pass;
If I can stir a soul to view the dawn
With seeing eyes and hold the vision clear
So he may drink the rapture when 'tis gone,
To purify some sordid atmosphere;
If I can help the human ear to hear
The gladness in the waterfall's refrain;
The tenderness of robins piping clear;
The healing in the sound of falling rain;
If I can rouse but one to that rebirth
Which sees God mirrored in each flower and tree—
To feel his oneness with the whole of earth—
Why, that will be a priceless joy to me!*

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace! Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood, as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.***

*Grace C. Bostwick

**St. Francis of Assisi

Pilgrimage and Warfare

You are those who have continued with me in my trials. (Luke 22:28) Read Luke 22:1-28

In many if not most of our churches, we will celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper sometime this evening. It is both fitting and proper so to do. We are to commemorate our Lord's last meal with his disciples and his offering of himself in the sacrifice of the Cross.

The ancient words of invitation common to the free churches include this phrase: "As we draw near to our Lord's table, let us earnestly consider our great need for having our comfort and strength renewed in this, *our earthly pilgrimage and warfare.*"

Two words are of singular importance: "earthly," and "pilgrimage." By the first we confess that, we have no continuing city here and that for whatever our appointed time may be earth is but our temporary home—only one of the many mansions in our Father's house. By the second we admit to being on a journey. Even if we reside in the same town or in the same house from the cradle to the grave, still our aspirations and expectations are on the move and we must go from moment to moment, from day to day, from week to week, from month to month and from year to year, never certain as to what the future will bring. We need *comfort*, perhaps because of some event that has already occurred. We need *strength*, certainly because of what may call forth our best effort on the morrow.

I would hope and trust that all of what I have been sharing with you these past six weeks may find some culmination as you partake of the loaf and of the cup. They truly symbolize the body that was broken and the blood that was shed for us on Calvary's hill. But they also symbolize God's unbroken promises and at the same time provide opportunity for us to renew promises of our own—especially if we are repentant enough to remember the ones we have broken. Think too of how the Table speaks of our oneness in Christ; we *all* have the *same* great need for having our comfort and strength renewed; we do not make our earthly pilgrimage alone. It helps immeasurably to know that we stand together with many other would-be Christians in that warfare in which our lives are tested and our souls refined.

Prayer: I count it among my rarest gifts to be an invited guest at your table, Lord. Let me not go away without a prayer for myself, for those who minister and for all who worship with me.

. . . They Crucified My Lord

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. (Mark 15:20) Read Mark 15:1-39

There are many lessons to be learned through the events of the first Good Friday. Indeed, those of us who plan and help conduct the annual three-hour vigil of this day that is traditional in so many of our communities, find something new and enlightening each time we meditate upon the seven last words of our Lord from the Cross. I would let the service you may attend this day inform you all over again concerning Jesus' faith and courage, the lengths to which both hatred and love can go, and the sense that *we* were there when they crucified our Lord. But I would have you think especially of how the enemies of Christ were primarily the enemies of truth. The mistake such enemies have made time and again is to have believed that they could do away with the truth they were unable to accept by eliminating those who spoke it! The classic examples, the *worst* examples of man's inhumanity to man, are those in which people have found it easier to kill than to change their minds.

Think, too, of the crosses you have had to bear and take heart from these words by an unknown author:

"For every hill I've had to climb, for every stone that bruised my feet, for all the blood and sweat and grime, for blinding storms and searing heat, my heart sings but a grateful song—these were the things that made me strong. For all the heartaches and the tears, for all the anguish and the pain, and for the hopes that lived in vain, I do give thanks, for now I know—these were the things that helped me grow. "Tis not the softer things of life which stimulate man's will to strive, but bleak adversity and strife do most to keep man's will alive. O'er rose-strewn paths the weaklings creep, but brave hearts dare to climb the steep."

*Prayer: I thank thee, Lord, that all my joy is touched with pain, that shadows fall on brightest hours, that thorns remain, so that earth's bliss may be my guide, and not my chain.**

*Adelaide A. Proctor (1825-1864)

A Building from God

So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:6-7) Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-21

On this quiet day between Good Friday and Easter, St. Paul's words to the little church at Corinth may well add further insight into that promise we have been looking toward since Ash Wednesday. Here we see the missionary's conviction that our earthly house, our body, is neither made nor meant to be the permanent residence of our spirits. We see his repeated assertion that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself; this saving of humanity from its own worst self in that unique fashion only God could utilize after centuries of men and women trying to legislate themselves into righteousness to no avail. To know these two vitally important things about God's purposes and his actions were not merely exciting to the apostle, they were the very cornerstone upon which he would build the early church. Believe them as you will, and rejoice that they are also the cornerstones of your hope.

As we make our daily round, slowly growing up into some greater spiritual stature, there are all manner of guideposts available, desirable, essential. I would share a favorite of mine, one you can commit to memory before you have finished your morning coffee, and again from an unknown source:

Every morning lean thine arms awhile
Upon the window-sill of heaven
And gaze upon thy Lord,
Then, with the vision in thy heart,
Turn strong to meet the day.

The "window-sill" of heaven may take many forms for many different people: an actual view of lake or hills or sky, a favorite painting, listening to music which lifts heart and mind and spirit, a particular portion of scripture or a passage from a treasured book, or just closing our eyes to imagine that we *are* leaning and that we *are* gazing. Whatever you may choose to signify this contact, take time for it, cherish the moments you use, and then, turn strong to meet *your* day!

*Prayer: Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me; place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see. Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.**

Christ Is Risen!

He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. (Matthew 28:6) Read Matthew 28:1-20

To go back to the beginning: Our experiences of God's forgiveness, his grace, his courage and his presence all serve to undergird our belief in his promise of eternal life which the coming of Easter, this morning, lifts up in celebration. It is my prayer for all who have read the foregoing pages that the memories and hopes I have shared will have truly led to a renewal of your trust in God's never-failing love. I leave you now, with some personal words of hope which have meant a great deal to a number of the friends I have been privileged to know in the congregation I now serve:

I do not fear death. I just do not want to give up my hold on life . . . yet. There are still too many things I would like to do, and there are too many things I believe I ought to try to do before willingly bowing out through the wings and looking for a role in another play! But when my strength has been largely dissipated, when my mind is no longer capable of dealing intelligently with what I must cope with to be really alive, then . . . then, I'll truly look forward to some brief sabbatical in which to be fully refreshed in body, mind and spirit . . . in the assurance that there will be some very real purpose to be strived for, some very real usefulness for whatever I may have learned . . . and the prospect of discovering what is in God's other room will be intriguing and exciting and filled with great expectation. For nearly 2,000 years the Church has taught that Christ ascended into heaven, there to sit at the right hand of God. But you and I know that the Christ in whom we believe has not been content to merely sit. His spirit has continued to be at work toward the accomplishment of some very real purposes, forever characterized by usefulness. Hopefully, as with his spirit, so too with yours, and with mine.

*Prayer: No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life! Life is nought without thee; aid us in our strife. Make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love; bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above. Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son; Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won. Amen.**

About The Author, By The Author

The preacher for my ordination service advised the people of my first parish that "ministers do not happen, they are *caused*." He was more prophetic than he knew! It has been the love and support and encouragement of hundreds of lay persons which have caused me to discover, during almost 33 years, the marvelous opportunities, challenges and satisfactions to be found in the pastorate; no one has ever enjoyed it more.

The roots I know best were planted by pioneer ancestors in the mountains of western North Carolina. By "degrees" these were transplanted to Berea College, Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago. Churches served have included two in Illinois, one in Virginia and now, going on 18 years, a 145 year-old suburban parish in Ohio, with a congregation of folk so responsive that the grass has had no greener hue on the other side of any fence.

Each church has allowed time for involvement in wider ministries of the denomination: teaching in a host of summer camps and conferences; Association Moderator and Conference President under the old Congregational structure; the national committee on Racial and Cultural Relations, (1956-1958) the Council for Christian Social Action, (1958-1965) the Board of Trustees of Elon College, (1958-1964) . . . Elon conferred an honorary doctorate in 1957 . . . and the Board for Homeland Ministries, (1965-1973). In the past ten years, being an instructor in the Lay Ministry program of the Eastern Ohio Association has afforded a privilege few ministers have known.

The career here described has been greatly sustained and enriched by my wife, Jo, who has never ceased to uphold my best possibilities and with whom I have shared innumerable interests and hobbies . . . primarily music, canoeing, the collecting and refinishing of antiques and the restoration of a home on a small Wisconsin lake to which we plan to retire. Our children, Douglas and Rebecca, and grandchildren, Steven and Kate, remind us of how old we are and help to keep us young at heart.

G.D.A.

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A TIME FOR RENEWAL

And I will give you a new heart—I will give you new and right desires—and put a new spirit within you. I will . . . give you new hearts of love.—Ezekiel 36:26

On our church campus, we have a large number of walnut trees. In the fall the walnut trees drop their leaves. Those that don't fall off are blown off by what we call, in California, the Santa Ana winds. These are strong winds that periodically come whipping through our area.

I was walking through our barren walnut grove the other day, and I saw here and there a dead leaf still clinging to the branch. The strong winds hadn't blown them off. The winter rains hadn't washed them off either.

Sometimes we have problems like that. They just seem to hang on, and the winds will not blow them off. The storms will not wash them off. But wait—in a little while new sap will come from the deep roots, surging through the trunk into the branches and a new bud will push the dead leaf off. *Every dead leaf that still clings on through the wintertime is doomed because new life will push it off in the spring!*

Depressed? Deflated? Defeated? New life can come to you! But you can't do it alone. Jesus said, "I am the Vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5). He is the life—he will push off the old and make room for the new.

Every day I am being renewed through the life and power of Jesus Christ.

WHERE'S THE NEW?

When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun! All these new things are from God. . . .—II Corinthians 5:17, 18

Where are the new buds in your life? Where is new life surging within you? I believe every problem is really an opportunity for God to work miracles. Describe a pressing problem and then write down all the potential opportunities for God to work a miracle.

My problem is _____

God's opportunities for miracles are _____

I praise you, God, for my problems, which are opportunities hiding your great possibilities. Amen.

RUN TO THE SUNRISE

Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.—Psalm 97:11 RSV

Early one morning I went for a long run. I came to an intersection where I could either keep on going east, turn to the south, or head north. If I turned south I would have a view of the breaking of the dawn over the ocean. If I headed north I would catch a view of the mountains in the breaking sunlight. Both options were tempting.

If I kept running east, I would be running up a slight hill, but I would be running toward what was already a growing golden glow. I knew I would catch the daybreak, and I would feel the first long shaft of golden sunlight falling on my chilled face.

I started running toward the ocean, but I found I was running with my back to the daybreak, and that was disappointing. I felt I would be missing out on something beautiful.

So I had an easy decision. I turned to the east, and *I ran to the sunrise!* And I was not disappointed. When I reached the top of the hill, the sun broke over the horizon and the bursting light was like being born anew.

How do you run to the light? You run to the light of God's word!

Lord, I am running to your sunrise. I am thinking about you. I am being warmly blessed—right now!

BECOMING LIKE HIM

We are already God's children, right now, and we can't even imagine what it is going to be like later on. But we do know this, that when he comes we will be like him, as a result of seeing him as he really is.—I John 3:2

This story is told about one of America's favorite entertainers—Dick Van Dyke. One night in his Arizona home, he and a number of guests were playing the game "Who-I'd-Like-Most-to-Be." One person wanted to be Beethoven. Someone else said he would like to be Rockefeller. And so it went. When it came around to Dick Van Dyke, he hesitated, and sincerely but shyly explained, "I don't want to sound silly, but I'd like most to be Christ."

That excites me, because I agree with his choice! For Jesus Christ is the greatest possibility thinker who has ever lived! He really should have been an impossibility thinker—he had every reason. He was a minority, a citizen of an oppressed land, uneducated, poor, and untraveled. Along with all of this, he served with little thanks.

But he knew the secret. Looking at his disciples, he shared that secret with them when he said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26 RSV). Sharing God's new life makes you one of God's possibility people!

Christ lives within me now. I am one of his possibility people! My life is filled with hope.

HAVE COURAGE!

Be strong! Be courageous! Do not be afraid . . . For the Lord your God will be with you. He will neither fail you nor forsake you.—Deuteronomy 31:6

Dr. Henry Poppen, who was one of the first missionaries to go to China and who spent over forty years there, once told me about the time he went to a remote village where presumably missionaries had never before visited.

Dr. Poppen told the villagers about Jesus—how he was gentle, kind, loving, and forgiving. When he finished talking about Jesus, one of the village men came to him and said, "Oh, we know Jesus! He has been here!"

"No, no," the missionary protested, "Jesus lived and died in a country far from here, long ago."

"Oh, no," the people replied. "He died here. Come, we'll show you his grave."

The villagers led Dr. Poppen outside the city to a Chinese cemetery where an American was buried. There on the tombstone was the name of a Christian medical doctor who, all on his own, felt called by God to go and live in this village, and to die there. When the villagers heard what Jesus was like, they remembered the doctor.

How courageous that doctor must have been. He knew what Paul meant when he wrote, "We, too, are weak in our bodies, . . . but now we live and are strong . . . and have all of God's power to use!" (II Corinthians 13:4).

By the power of Christ in me, I am courageous!

THE STAR OF JOY

... for the joy of the Lord is your strength.
—Nehemiah 8:10

JOY—what is it? Write down your definition of joy:

Your definition probably described some emotions or feelings that reflect an inner bouyancy. When you are filled with the joy of the Lord, your faith is strong. Nothing can discourage or defeat you. The prophet Nehemiah understood this when he told the people to celebrate, “. . . for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

A strong faith is built on the joy of the Lord. And when there is joy, there is room only for the positive things in life.

My definition of joy is *Jesus* first, *Others* second, *Yourself* last. Unselfish living is the key to personal happiness and joy.

But I also see joy as a star with five points—Conceive, Receive, Believe, Relieve, and ACTchieve. All five points are necessary. We'll consider these this week.

My faith is stronger because I am filled with the joy of the Lord—now!

THE STAR OF JOY—CONCEIVE

Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore—Psalm 16:11 RSV

The first point in the star of joy is *Conceive*. When Jesus Christ comes into your life, he fills your heart with the love that will produce joy. But you must first conceive of the fact that it is possible for Christ to come into your life.

Perhaps you underestimate your faith. Take the psalmist at his word. He said that God will show you the path of life. Believe that with the help of God's Holy Spirit you can now *conceive*, imagine, and visualize Christ's coming into your mind and heart. Great joy comes when you begin to *conceive* that it is possible for God to come into your life. It's possible!

Lord, I feel Christ's spirit coming into my mind now. I believe it is possible for him to live within me. Amen.

THE STAR OF JOY—RECEIVE

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God.—John 1:12

RSV

The second point in our star of joy is *Receive*. God's wonderful book, the Bible, makes it very clear that if you ask Jesus Christ to come into your life, he will do it. Now I can't completely explain this reality scientifically, psychologically, or any other way. But it is a fact. The Bible teaches it. Try it. It works!

Through thoughts about Christ, and through ideas about Jesus that come into your mind, Christ comes into your life. Through moods of religious feelings that center in Christ, he comes into your life. Through warm, peaceful feelings of love for Christ, he comes into your life.

If you have never done this before, take the time now to invite Jesus Christ into your life. *Receive* him and wait for ideas, thoughts, feelings, and emotions that rise from the very living mind of Christ and reach into your mind and life.

Whether you have just invited Christ into your life now, or have invited him in before, take the space below and describe what it means to you to be a child of God.

Christ lives within me now!

THE STAR OF JOY—BELIEVE

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.—Romans 15:13 RSV

The third point in our star of joy is *Believe*. After you have conceived of the facts and received Christ into your life, don't expect rockets to explode. Simply *believe*.

The early Christians in the book of Acts saw trouble erupt in their lives when they believed, but they were filled with joy. God does not promise that your eyes will fill up with tears or that your heart will burst with emotion. This may happen. However, joy comes to you when you believe, because God promises to act on our faith.

When faith grows weak, joy fades. Are you experiencing doubts? Identify them. Write them down. Then change your doubts into affirmations and watch your star of joy begin to shine brightly again.

I have received Christ into my life, and I believe he is there now!

THE STAR OF JOY—RELIEVE

Since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in his promises, we can have real peace with him because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.—Romans 5:1

Point four is *Relieve*. Joy comes when you relieve yourself and your mind of all negative thoughts. Fear, hate, doubt, suspicion, hostility, unbelief—all of these are negative forces that rob you of joy. Faith does not harmonize with any of these negative emotions, so *relieve* your mind of them.

I recall the time that one small dead spider in the thermostat at the base of the stairs in our sanctuary knocked out our whole air-conditioning system one hot Sunday morning. If a dead spider can do that, what do you think one prejudice or one hate or one worry that you hang onto can do? Joy fills the vacuum left when you *relieve* your mind of negative thoughts.

Paul understood this. He wrote, "Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about" (Philippians 4:8). Memorize this verse. When negative thoughts press in on you, repeat this affirmation until your mind is clear and open to God and his goodness.

I relieve my mind of negative thoughts by thinking of good things.

THE STAR OF JOY—ACT-CHIEVE

I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.—Philippians 3:13 RSV

And now point five—*ACTchieve*. I've deliberately misspelled the word achieve—ACT-chieve. And that's the key to completing joy!

Act! Be a sprinkler head, and let the water of joy flow through. Be a fountain pen, and let Christ, like beautiful ink, write his message through your life.

What are your dreams? What would you like to achieve? What could you do that would bring you great joy? Do it! Dare not only to be a dreamer, but dare to *act!*

Write down one of your dreams, that if accomplished would bring you great joy: _____

Now write down the first thing you would have to do to act and achieve your dream. Then do it with God's help:

Lord, I look at my dream, and I will never be a quitter. Thank you for strength and patience to ACTchieve my dream, for I believe it is your dream for me. Amen.

I BELIEVE IN YOU

... we see God's abounding grace forgiving us.
—Romans 5:20

An esteemed English clergyman told J. Wallace Hamilton: "The turning point came in my life when I was seventeen years old. I always had trouble with my brothers and sisters. I was called the black sheep in the family. We were always fighting each other.

"One night they were all picking on me until I could stand it no longer. I jumped up and cried, 'I'm getting out of here!' I ran up the stairs and there suddenly in the darkened hallway I ran into my grandmother. She had been listening to it all. She stood there in the hallway and stopped me by putting her hand on my shoulder. With tears in her eyes she said only a few words to me, but they changed my life. She said, 'John, I believe in you.' "

And right now, can't you see Jesus? He comes down from the cross and stops you in the middle of your tracks by putting his nail-scarred hand on your shoulder. He says to you, "I've heard everything, and I want you to know, I believe in you!"

What a great moment that is! And when you've experienced his acceptance and forgiveness, you'll become a forgiving person yourself!

Lord, you believe in me! Thank you! Amen.

LOVINGLY FORGIVE

If we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.

—I John 1:9

Back in the fourteenth century, a monk announced to the people of his village that he was going to preach the greatest sermon ever preached on the Love of God. He urged everyone to attend.

At the appropriate hour, the cathedral filled with the old and the young. Throughout the service, everyone anticipated the great discourse. At the proper time, though, the monk did not enter the pulpit, but instead went to the candelabrum, drew out a long burning candle, and then walked to the altar to the sculptured form of Christ nailed to the cross.

He silently lifted the candle until the glow was directly underneath one of the pierced hands. He held the candle there with his back to the congregation.

Then he shifted the candle and held it below the other pierced hand of Jesus. Slowly he moved the candle to the side of our Lord where the spear had pierced him. And then he dropped to his knees in prayer, now holding the glimmering light so that the glow fell on the nail-pierced feet.

After a moment, the monk stood and turned, holding the candle before him so that the people could see the gentle tears on his face as he said, "My beloved people, that is my sermon on the love of God for you." And he dismissed them with a benediction!

My heart is filled with love—God's love. I cannot help being a forgiving person today!

LIKE HIM

But we Christians . . . can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.—II Corinthians 3:18

Legend tells us that the beautiful Helen of Troy, over whom many battles were fought, was lost after one of the battles. When the army returned to Greece, Helen was not on any of the ships. Menelaus went to try and find her at great personal peril. He finally found her in one of the seaport villages. She had been suffering from amnesia. Forgetting who she was, she had stooped to the lowest possible level and was living as a prostitute.

Menelaus found her in rags, dirt, shame, and dishonor. He looked at her and called, "Helen." Her head turned. "You are Helen of Troy!" he said. And with those words, her back straightened and the royal look came back. She had been redeemed!

You may be deflated and dishonored in your own eyes because you don't realize who you are. You are a member of the royal family. When you accept Jesus Christ into your life, you are a member of the family of God. You are no longer a lost soul. You have been forgiven and have recovered your honor!

I am a member of Christ's family!

SCARS BECOME STARS

From being weaklings they become strong.—Hebrews 11:34 Phillips

A guide said to me one time some years ago in the Netherlands: "See that huge concrete plug in the dike? We had a leak there one time, and the sea rushed in. Many people perished in the floods. But we plugged it with concrete—steel-reinforced concrete—and it'll never break there again."

A doctor said to me one time as he pointed to a nurse walking down the hall: "She's the best nurse we have. She works so hard and is so dedicated to the patients." Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "I guess it has something to do with the fact that when she was a teen-ager she spent ten months on her back in this hospital."

Before my secretary, Lois Wendell, died of cancer, people would often tell me how much she had helped them as they faced the uncertainties of an operation. Where she was weak, there she became strong!

You can turn your scars into stars. Your hurts can become halos. The principle here is that if you want to live an emotionally healthy and happy life you must discover how to handle the hurts that come. The writer of the Hebrews assures us that our weaknesses can be turned into strength!

I am one with unlimited strength. God helps me turn my scars into stars!

NO GRUDGES

Love . . . does not hold grudges.—I Corinthians 13:5

As a boy, I loved the winter storms. But what we didn't appreciate were the blizzards, because they would come in with driving winds of fifty to sixty miles an hour and close the roads. We would be isolated on our farm. The only good thing about the blizzards was that I didn't have to go to school.

But soon we would look out down the road and see the snowplow coming, cutting through the drifts, slicing the snow, chopping it up and blowing it into a huge, spewing stream in the ditch. And as the plow would pass, we were free to go to the store, and I could return to school.

Resentment is like snowdrifts, and forgiveness is the snowplow. You see, in the eyes of many people, forgiveness is simply a matter of passive acquittal. But in the Christian context, forgiveness is a snowplow—opening the road, removing barriers, permitting communication to be restored.

A lot of resentment can build up in our lives in the course of a day. And the only way to put joy on your face and in your heart is to find an overpowering love that can remove resentment and fill you with FORGIVENESS.

"I forgive you" is the language of love!

Today I speak the language of love. I am immune to resentment and grudges because I can lovingly forgive.

THE AWESOMENESS OF FORGIVENESS

Lord, if you keep in mind our sins then who can ever get an answer to his prayers? But you forgive! What an awesome thing this is!—Psalm 130:4

During the first World War, the German armies swept over Belgium, destroying many of the cities. One day after the war was over, a Catholic nun with a group of her little students paused at a small Catholic shrine at the edge of the village. They knelt to repeat the Lord's Prayer. But around them was the rubble and the ruin, the resentment and the hurt of the war years; and there was one phrase they couldn't utter. The small group started again, "Forgive us our trespasses as we . . ." They could go no further—until from behind them came a strong man's voice: "As we forgive those who trespass against us." They looked around and saw King Albert! With his great spirit of forgiveness, he led the way!

Christ, our King, shows us how to conquer resentment and hurt. It was our King who cried from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Perhaps you need to forgive someone. Ask your King—Jesus Christ—to give you the ability. God can help you be a forgiving person. And he will flood your being with love, peace, and joy!

You, Lord, are helping me now to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Amen.

GOD CARES!

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.—Matthew 5:4 RSV

As a pastor, I am in the specialized work of dealing with the hurt, the lonely, the suffering, the sick, and the dying. For over twenty years I have trudged across the soft, green lawns of cemeteries with my arms around wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, relatives, and friends. I have sat in hospitals and wept with those who were weeping. Believe me, I am not blind to the reality of suffering.

William Saroyan recently said in a television interview, "Sorrow is a cloud which hangs over everyone, always, in this life." None of us escapes the very human pain and heartache that comes when we or someone close to us suffers.

But I have good news! Jesus said it: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted!" In the words of the old hymn, "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

It is possible for the vacant spot to be filled with a new love. It is possible for the smashed vase to be tenderly repaired and restored, or replaced. It is possible to make a comeback after heartbreak. It is possible because God cares!

Surely the Lord knows my sorrow and pain, and I believe God cares!

ONLY BROKEN HEARTS WILL DO

Blessed is the man who endures trial.—James 1:12
RSV

Too many of us will simply not slow down long enough to hear God's voice until we enter the valley of suffering. If your suffering turns you to God, does it not become a blessing?

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "The year King Uzziah died I saw the Lord!" (Isaiah 6:1). Many a father and mother have been converted to Christ through the death of a child. But what good is that to the child, the cynic asks. Jesus Christ answered that question when he said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone" (John 12:24 RSV). "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25 RSV).

There is no birth without birth pangs. And there is no entrance into eternal life except through the birth experience the world calls death.

Are you facing trials or troubles? Rejoice, for God is illuminating your path. He is conditioning you for a life of more effective service. In love's service, only broken hearts will do!

Lord, I am turning my sorrow into my servant, and I am a better servant than before. Amen.

STONE WALLS

Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.—II Timothy 2:3

John Wesley was once talking with a farmer friend. Wesley noticed a cow with her head over a stone wall and was perplexed. He asked the farmer, "Why would that cow be trying to look over the wall?" The farmer answered: "Well, that's simple. She's looking over the wall because she can't see through it."

Life is full of problems, setbacks, rejections, disappointments, discouragements. Even your prayers may seemingly go unanswered. You reach a point where you think God has forsaken you—prayer is ineffective, and God no longer seems real. You've run into a stone wall!

What do you do when you run into a stone wall and feel you just can't cope anymore? You stand there patiently and look over the stone wall.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. (Romans 5:3-5)

I am able to rejoice in my sufferings, Lord, because you are working in my life. Thank you. Amen.

HURTS BECOME HALOS

We, too, are weak in our bodies, as he was, but now we live and are strong, as he is, and have all of God's power to use.—II Corinthians 13:4

The other day I was watching as the elevator doors opened. I had just stepped out of my office in time to see a young mother with a little girl pulling at her skirt. The mother looked busy. She seemed to be rushed and even a little harrassed.

I asked my secretary, "Who is she? What is she doing here at this time of day?" My secretary reminded me that she was in charge of our Helping Hand project.

This young mother spends hours at the church collecting cans of soup and vegetables. When people call in to our twenty-four-hour counseling service and say they have no food, we have a policy that we will not give them money, but we will give them food and groceries. This young mother manages this whole operation.

My secretary reminded me: "You remember she wrote you a letter some months ago that really moved you. She thanked God for our wonderful congregation." I remembered. Her husband had been flat on his back for months, unable to work. She had a baby who became sick, and she couldn't work either. The church heard about her, and the ladies brought breakfast, lunch, and dinner for them, day after day, week after week.

She found a way to repay their love! And time after time, when I look at a great person, I know that somewhere that person was hurt and turned that hurt into a halo!

I belong to God. All that happens to me is part of his plan for my good.

CARRY ON

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—Matthew 11:28 RSV

I recognized them in the crowd. They were longtime friends of our family from the Midwest. As they walked toward me, I recalled what had happened to their two sons that sad summer morning years ago. Their two boys were having fun on the lake when their makeshift raft fell apart and the youngest boy drowned. Then, only two years later, their other son was killed as he was pinned under a tractor that tipped over in the field.

I greeted them and then asked, "How did you find strength to carry on?" The mother answered bravely: "Someone in a far off state sent me a letter with a simple affirmation. It said, 'God still loves you!' I repeated that over and over, and I still believe it!" Her eyes sparkled as she talked. Her husband stood there smiling through shining eyes.

The three of us held hands and prayed. I watched them as they walked off—tall and trusting souls. God's iron-pillared people!

Paul understood. He wrote, "Who then can ever keep Christ's love from us? When we have trouble or calamity, when we are hunted down or destroyed, is it because he doesn't love us anymore? . . . No . . . despite all this, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ who loved us enough to die for us" (Romans 8:35-37).

Nothing surprises me, for I am confident and strong through Christ!

IT WAS WORTH IT!

When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God!—Isaiah 43:2, 3 RSV

During the First World War, a soldier in the trenches saw his friend out in no-man's land—that ground between his trench and the trench of the enemy. His friend lay there wounded.

The man asked his officer, "May I go, sir, and bring him in?" The officer refused, saying, "No one can live out there, and if you go I will only lose you as well."

Disobeying the officer, the man went to save his friend, for they had been like brothers throughout the war. Somehow, he managed to get his friend on his shoulder and stagger back to his trench, only to fall mortally wounded with his friend.

The officer was angry. "I told you not to go. Now I have lost two good men. It was not worth it!"

With his dying breath, the man said, "But it was worth it, sir, because when I got to him, he said, 'Jim, I knew you'd come.' "

The distinct message of the cross of Jesus Christ is this: God will come to you when you cry out to him, even to the point of giving his life to prove his faithfulness to you.

Lord Jesus, I look at your cross and I feel your love and care for me.

DO IT NOW!

Serve each other with humble spirits, for God gives special blessings to those who are humble.—I Peter 5:5

St. Augustine spoke from the depths of a deep spiritual experience. As a wild, wanton, rebellious youth he deserted God, religion, and faith. It was only when the emptiness of his life threatened to swallow him that he falteringly turned to God. He briefly prayed, "O God, forgive me of all my sins—but not yet."

And back he went to spend his youthful energies in immorality. Again, the hollowness of his unholy life overwhelmed him. With a sinking feeling, he prayed again, "O God, forgive me for all my sins—save one." And again he left the place of prayer only to run with the hares and dash with the hounds.

But total peace will only come from total commitment. And so he came back to the God who made him. Deeply, sincerely, humbly, resolutely, he surrendered his life to Christ praying, "O God, forgive me for all my sins—and do it now. AMEN!"

Try praying this prayer. Mean it, and forgiveness, freedom, and fellowship will dissolve your tensions like the warm summer sun evaporates the morning dew in the meadow.

I now have a beautiful feeling of peace with God, for I am forgiven!

WHAT IS SIN?

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.—James 4:10 RSV

How do you define sin? I was asked that question by a reporter recently. My answer was very simple: Traditionally, sin has been defined as rebellion against God, an inner warfare, warfare between the self and God. But that is only the skin of sin. Think of sin as a golf ball. There is the outer skin; then there are the tight inner workings; and finally, at the core of every golf ball, is one solid, little hard rubber pellet. The skin of sin is rebellion. The core is much deeper. What is the core of sin? It is our innate, inherited, negative self-image!

The negative self-image is responsible for any and all sin. God's toughest job is making you believe you are a beautiful, wonderful person through redemption and salvation! Believe God when he tells you how great you are!

What do you have trouble believing? Where in your life do you lack self-confidence and the feeling that you are an attractive person made by God? Write it down:

Now cover up what you have written with the words "God Loves Me!"

Because God loves me, I believe in myself!

RECEIVE CHRIST

If anyone hears me calling him and opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and he with me.—Revelation 3:20

I spoke with a young woman recently who showed me a beautiful diamond ring that a certain young man had just given her. She was excited! We talked about the future and about the young man. Then I suggested that she make a commitment of her life to Jesus Christ.

"What does that mean?" she asked me.

I told her: "Receiving Christ is pretty much like receiving that diamond. You know what it means when you accept that diamond engagement ring. It means you make a commitment to him, and he makes a commitment to you. There is a growing relationship between the two of you, and you both begin to build your whole future on that commitment. You trust him, and he trusts you. Now you share secrets with him that you wouldn't share with anyone else, including me."

She nodded her head and replied, "I understand, and I would like to make that kind of commitment to Jesus Christ."

God offers you a diamond to wear on your heart, and the diamond's name is Jesus Christ. Accepting God's diamond is as simple as opening a door when you've heard someone knock. Invite Jesus Christ into your life and enjoy a future rich in fellowship with God himself.

Father, I am committing my life to you and feel your trust in me. Amen.

POWER-STEERING LIVING

Every morning tell him, "Thank you for your kindness," and every evening rejoice in all his faithfulness.—Psalm 92:2

E. Stanley Jones tells in his book *Abundant Living* this principle:

I am spiritually relaxed because I believe the central hypothesis of my life is right. Life is one long verification of that central hypothesis. This fact gives an inner sense of steadiness. This attitude toward life was tested in an airplane over St. Louis when we circled above the clouds for two hours, trying to land. The ceiling was so low that we could not get under. I had time to think. So I wrote down a life conclusion: "I am up in this plane and we have been circling over these clouds for about two hours. If we do not land safely I would like to leave my last will and testament to my friends and fellow followers of Christ: There is peace, perfect peace. Apart from my unfaithfulness to the highest, there are no regrets about the general course of my life. Life with Christ is the way to live. In this hour there is assurance—there is God underneath all the uncertainties of human existence. So I rest in God. God's best to you all. Living or dying I am His—His alone. Glory! Signed, E. Stanley Jones." . . .

I meet today, today. I do not telescope all next week into today . . . Dr. William Osler, the great surgeon, said, "The load of Tomorrow, added to that of Yesterday, carried Today, makes the strongest falter."

E. Stanley Jones knew how to clear his mind for power-steering living!

Today, I will live today. The past gives me courage, the future is in God's hand!

RESTORATION

Create in me a new, clean heart, O God, filled with clean thoughts and right desires.—Psalm 51:10

I remember, as a child, rubbing a furry, soft peach against my cheek. It felt so soft and good. But when I turned the peach over, the backside was all raw and rough. It had been scraped by the scratchy, splintered inside of a wooden bushel basket. As I looked at it, I realized there was absolutely nothing I could do to restore its soft luster.

You can take a violet blossom that feels just like velvet. You can pluck it, throw it down, and trample it under your foot. But when you pick up the crushed violet, nothing can restore it to its original velvety beauty.

You cannot redeem or replace the scraped and bruised side of a fuzzy peach or a crushed violet blossom. But God can restore your soul like new again! It is possible! It is happening all the time!

That's what the whole story of Christianity is about. God sent his son Jesus Christ into this world. As he said in Luke 19:10, "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (RSV).

Lord, I sense your power restoring and strengthening me. You are smoothing the rough places in my life. I am being redeemed! Thank you! Amen.

IT'S POSSIBLE

If you have faith, and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more.—Matthew 21:21

John Roebling was the engineer with the idea of bridging the river and tying Manhattan Island with Brooklyn. It was a fabulous idea, but all the bridge-building experts and structural engineers said it was impossible. Some agreed that the river might be spanned, but said that a 1,595 foot span would never stand up against the winds and the tides. But John Roebling and his son, Washington, figured out how the problems could be solved and how the obstacles would be overcome.

And then, as construction began, John Roebling was killed on the job, and in the same accident, Washington suffered the bends underneath the water. The son survived, but was left with permanent brain damage, so that he never walked or talked again.

Everybody said to forget the project. But not Washington. He developed a code of communication by touching one finger to his wife's arm. And he communicated the dream through her to the engineers on the project. For thirteen years, Washington Roebling supervised construction that way. And finally in 1883 traffic streamed across the completed Brooklyn Bridge. When Washington Roebling was told the news, he wept for joy. The impossible dream had become a reality!

God, you are helping me right now discover the great possibilities you have planted within me. Amen.

IF

*Accept our praise, O Lord, for all your glorious power.
We will write songs to celebrate your mighty acts!*
—Psalm 21:13

Everyone is faced, from time to time, with problems that appear to be impossible to solve. A key to successful living is to plan every day with two questions: (1) What is the biggest problem I'm facing today? (2) What will I do about it today? Keep that up every day, and you'll be surprised where you're at a year from now! Briefly describe your "impossible dream":

Now I want you to practice possibility thinking. For some of you, it may seem very difficult and futile. But I want you to make the effort! Look again at the problem you just described. Now complete the following statement.

IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE IF _____

The "IF" is fading away, and I can feel my faith growing. I believe it is possible.

“I’LL BE ALL RIGHT”

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.—Philippians 1:6 NIV

One night the Berkshire Boys found themselves at the edge of a stream where they were caught off guard by the Confederates. Fleeing across the bridge to the other side, the commander discovered that he had left his sword in his tent. Before he could start back, a teen-ager named Johnny Ring said to him, “Colonel, let me go for it, sir.”

Johnny Ring ran across the bridge, got the sword out of the tent and started back. When he reached the bridge, flames were licking at the edges of the boards, but he ran across without hesitating, and he dropped the sword at his commander’s feet. He was badly burned, and as he lay there dying, Colonel Conwell, an atheist, looked at him and wept, saying, “Johnny, I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

Johnny replied, “Don’t be sorry, sir, I’m not afraid to die. I know Jesus Christ, and I’ll be all right.” With his dying breath he asked, “Colonel, are you afraid to die?”

“Yes,” replied the commander.

Beside Johnny’s body that night, the commander knelt down, and in a great moment alone, he invited Jesus Christ into his life as his Savior. As he knelt, he made a vow that he would become the minister that Johnny had wanted to be. He told God that he would work sixteen hours a day—eight for Johnny and eight for himself. Conwell became one of the great ministers of his day.

I am an instrument of God’s peace and God’s possibilities.

UNLOCK THE GATE

If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.—Ecclesiastes 11:4

Several years ago I disciplined myself to walk several miles each day. Then I fell off a ladder, was hospitalized for a short time, and then restricted in any physical activity for several months. Of course, I got out of the habit of walking. To get myself going again, I mentally told myself that if I started walking again, I would keep my heart healthy, stay thinner, even look younger, and maintain a good posture. Each reason added guilt, but still I put off walking.

Then one day my barber told me to wash my hair every day for a week and take a walk to dry it. That did it! I had the extra prod to get started. Prior to that time I had good reasons to begin, but it took someone else to push me out the door and get me started. My barber unlocked my starting gate!

Have you started yet? If you're still working at beginning, build a sense of urgency into your thinking and get going. Just do a little bit—just enough to begin. Decide only to take that first step. Then decide to take the second step. And then the third. Now tell yourself, "I've got a great thing going—I must not stop!"

Remember, the hardest part of any job is getting started. So what are you going to do today to get started?

Beginning is half done! Already I can feel energy flowing into me as I begin the creative task God has given me!

PLANT THE SEED

The Lord is my strength, my song, and my salvation.—Exodus 15:2

I'll never know to what extent being born an Iowa farm boy made me the possibility thinker I am today. I don't think anything is more exciting than springtime on a farm.

I remember many years when Dad needed all the grain of last year's crop to feed the cattle and the livestock. But there was one little corner of our corn bin where there was grain that Dad would never touch.

I would say to him, "But, Dad, you still have some grain in there."

And he would say, "No, that is next year's seed corn, and I cannot use it for feed." So he saved it.

Then the spring came. How desperately he needed every kernel to feed the livestock! But what did he do? He buried it in the ground.

Now suppose my father had studied the odds. Let's suppose he had said: "Let's see. I've got a kernel of corn. If I feed it to the cattle, I know it will be productive. I can be sure of it. There is no risk. On the other hand, I can plant it in the ground, but that's filled with risk. Weeds could choke it, birds could eat it, it could rot, or the hail and winds could destroy it just as it starts to grow. It could be worthless. It's risky to put it in the ground. But it just might multiply a hundredfold!"

Don't wait because something is risky. Break loose and begin before it's possible. Only then will your dream really become a possibility!

I am making my decisions on God's ability, not on my ability.

COURAGE TO CARE

The Lord is my Helper and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me.—Hebrews 13:6

Some years ago a nameless person went to an orphanage and asked, "Is there any orphan here that nobody wants?" The matron answered: "Indeed there is. She's ten years old, ugly to look at, and has a very horrible hunchback. In fact, the only thing decent about her is her name—Mercy Goodfaith."

The inquirer said, "That's exactly the child I want." And together they left.

Thirty-five years later, the head of the Orphanage Inspection Department in the state of Iowa turned in a report about another orphanage that said: "This home is outstanding. It is clean, the food is good, and the matron of the place has a soul that oozes love.

"All of the children are well cared for and show the effects of the matron's love. As they gathered at the piano following dinner, I observed an atmosphere unlike any I have seen in my work. Never have I seen such beautiful eyes as in that matron. They were so stunning that I almost forgot how homely her face was and how unattractive was the hunchback. Her name is Mercy Goodfaith."

Because some nameless person had the courage to care for an ugly orphan, Mercy Goodfaith learned how to love and has multiplied that love a hundred times over. My prayer for you today is that God will give you the courage to care!

I dare to believe that God is giving me the courage to care enough to do something wonderful today!

FACE INTO THE WIND

The Lord is my Helper and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me.—Hebrews 13:6

Christ gives *courage!* Real, dynamic courage. He promises, "Peace give I to you!" And he can do this because everyone knows Christ is no longer afraid of dying. And when you have eliminated the fear of death, you have eliminated the source of all fears.

Some time ago I was reading British history when I came across an interesting anecdote. There was a time in the West Indies when there were five ships anchored in the harbor. One was a British ship.

Suddenly an unexpected storm came up, and the waves rolled fiercely into the harbor. The British officer weighed anchor and set his ship at sea directly into the mounting, rolling waves. He sailed into the face of the storm.

Two days later, battered and bruised, but still afloat and intact, he came back to the harbor. In the calm that hovered over the now still waters, he surveyed the scene and found that the other four ships that had not weighed anchor for *fear* of the storm had been driven onto the shore and destroyed!

There is only one way to conquer a fear, and that is to face it! If Christ is your Lord and God, you can face any fear without being afraid! *Come-alive power gives courage!*

Lord, in the storms of life, I face into the wind—courageous because you give me power! Amen.

KEEP ON SHINING!

The godly are bold as lions!—Proverbs 28:1

The judge was campaigning for reelection and was running on his record of integrity. He was a distinguished and honorable gentleman of no small charity. And his opponent was conducting a vicious, mud-smearing, unfair campaign against him.

At a news conference, a reporter stood and asked the judge: "Your Honor, do you know what your opponent is saying about you? Are you aware of the criticism he is leveling at you? Would you care to comment?"

The judge looked at his campaign counselors and the chairman of his committee. Then he looked at his audience and calmly replied: "Well, when I was a boy I had a dog. And every time the moon was full, that old hound dog would howl and bark at the things he saw in the bright face of the moon. We never did sleep very well those nights. He would bark and howl at the moon all night long." With that he concluded his remarks.

"That's beside the point," his campaign chairman impatiently said. "You haven't answered your critics!"

The judge explained, "I just did! When that dog barked at the moon, *the moon kept right on shining!* I don't intend to say anything back to my critic. I'm going to keep right on shining—quietly and calmly, like the moon!"

That takes courage! That's the courage required to sail to the top and not worry about what people will say if you succeed or if you fail.

*I'm shining, Lord! I can feel your courage within me.
Amen.*

DISCOVER YOURSELF

[God's] unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And he did this because he wanted to!—Ephesians 1:5

"I must tell you my story," the sixty-three-year-old woman said to me. "I was thirteen when I became an atheist. I had experienced something terrible, and I prayed and prayed to God about it. So then and there I decided there was no God.

"My husband and I have been married for forty-two years. All those years he was a believer and would faithfully attend church. But I would never listen to him. I don't know how he put up with me.

"But," she continued, "one Sunday morning after my husband left for church, I listened to you on the TV set. Something about the way you twinkled kept me from turning you off. You talked about Jesus and his love. I felt something inside that seemed very real. I still couldn't put my hand on God, but as I listened, I prayed and invited Jesus into my life. I changed right there! I could hardly wait to tell my husband when he came home."

By this time, both she and her husband were crying as they went on to describe the beautiful person she really was. Almost fifty years an atheist, and only recently she has discovered herself! When you are related to Jesus Christ, you can discover the beautiful person you really are!

I greet today related to Jesus Christ. He makes both me and my day beautiful!

COURAGE, THE BACKSIDE OF LOVE

God loves you very much . . . ; don't be afraid! Calm yourself; be strong—yes, strong!—Daniel 10:19

"Here I am!" the young voice called out to the stranger walking by. The little girl was barely two years old, lying in bed hugging her teddy bear. Both of her tiny legs were hanging in the air, in traction.

"Well, hello!" the new friend enthused.

"I have brittle bones," the tiny girl responded quickly. "This one is broken. Last time it was that one," she said as she pointed to her right leg. "I've had twenty-two fractures!"

By the time she was six, Charlotte had been in and out of the hospital eighty-five times. She has a rare disease that causes her bones to break very easily. By the time she was ten she had had over two hundred fractures.

"I've only seen her cry twice," a close friend of the family said. "Once, when she had to miss her sister's wedding because she fractured her arm. The other time was when she made a community appeal to urge people to give so crippled children could walk."

Charlotte has never weighed more than fifty pounds, but she pushed through high school, chose a university with ramps for wheelchairs, and graduated four years later cum laude. She went on to law school and passed the state bar exam. All fifty pounds of her! She has courage! She's so much in love with life that she'll fight every day! Courage is the backside of the coin of love!

Courage fills my mind and heart, for I know that God is my strength!

ONE BUCKET AT A TIME

Don't be troubled or afraid.—John 14:27

Why do we exalt courage? Because every person who chooses to be brave inspires the rest of the human race! The entire human family is exalted, honored, and dignified when someone fights a brave battle.

Lillian Dickson and her husband felt called by God to the island called Formosa. When they arrived, they talked to a government official in social services. He looked at this young and naive couple and laughed. "Look, go back to America. You can't possibly succeed here. There is no way!"

He stood up and walked over to the window and pointed outside. "Look, you can see the ocean. Helping people here in Formosa is like trying to change the ocean one bucket at a time!"

Young Lillian Dickson got out of her chair and said, "Well, then, I am going to fill my bucket!" And they left the room. Fifty plus years later, her husband dead, Lillian is still filling her bucket. She has established over one thousand churches, schools, and hospitals. It all happened because she and her husband had the courage and the willingness to fail!

If they had turned around and gone home, no one would have blamed them. But they stayed and faced possible futility. And Formosa is a better place today because of her courage!

Today I live courageously—speaking only words of hope that will encourage others to more courage!

JESUS IS LORD

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," and really mean it, unless the Holy Spirit is helping him.—I Corinthians 12:3

Do you dare to trust God? Jesus did. As he made his triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus was saying to all the people, "I dare to trust my Father who is in Heaven." He dared to trust God even when he knew how costly that decision would be!

It is interesting to see how kings have made their triumphal entry into their capitals. If you've traveled through Europe and visited some of the grand museums in Portugal, England, or Austria, you will have seen magnificent, splendid carriages carved out of fascinating woods. The fenders and corners of the hoods and the covers of the carriages are adorned with carved cupids, then entirely overlaid with gold! The Prussian kings came riding into their cities in gold-plated, cupid-encrusted chariots.

Roll back the centuries and watch the Roman emperors as they enter, riding in golden chariots drawn by six or eight stallions. As they enter the city, the streets are cleared for two miles. What pomp! What excitement!

Then there was Caesar. He had to be different, so his chariot was drawn by six tawny lions. Pompey used elephants to pull his chariot.

And then there was Jesus—King of Israel and Lord of all creation! He entered his capital city riding on a donkey! No pomp, no show, no lofty pride—just love in his face!

Jesus, your love draws me closer to you this day! Amen.

HERE IS THE KING

There is peace with God through Jesus, the Messiah, who is Lord of all creation.—Acts 10:36

Who was this Jesus, who came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey? The crowds cried, "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12:13 KJV). Yet a little later this same week, they are crying out, "Crucify him!"

Perhaps the most profound question in all of history is: What do you think of Jesus? Think a moment, and then either write down your ideas, make a list, draw a picture, or do something below that expresses your attitude toward Jesus.

My thoughts are focused on you, Lord Jesus. I feel your spirit within. Amen.

RIDE ON, O KING

Great and marvelous are your doings, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of Ages.—Revelation 15:3

A poet once wrote,

So lowly doth the Savior ride
A paltry borrowed beast,
Nor pomp, nor show, nor lofty pride,
Nor boast above the least.

His scepter is his kindliness,
His grandeur is his grace,
His royalty is holiness,
And love is in his face.

'Tis thus the dear Messiah came
To break the tyrants' will,
To heal the people of their shame,
And nobleness instill.

Ride on, O King, ride on your way,
While men of low degree
Exalt and usher in the day
Of peace we long to see.

(Almer Pennewell 1876-1969)

Why was he crucified? If he was gentle, kind, noble, and loving, why did they crucify him? For one simple reason: The people expected him to lead a revolution. They expected him to be the radical who would drive the Romans out and set Israel free!

But Jesus was not interested in politics. He was there to change hearts and bring new life to you and me! Let him be Lord! Allow Jesus to be himself—the Lord God Almighty.

Lord, forgive me for trying to make you something less than you are. I worship you as King—my King—today! Amen.

LOVE!

For this is my blood, sealing the New Covenant. It is poured out to forgive the sins of multitudes.—Matthew 26:28

When you allow Jesus Christ to come into sharp focus in the core of your mind, a fire goes on—the fire of the Holy Spirit of the living God. You are turned from negative to positive, and that's exciting!

The positive idea that Jesus expressed as he sat to eat with his disciples is so simple that we often are inclined to ignore it. It sounds like old hat, but it's as revolutionary as tomorrow! The idea is the powerful, positive idea of love, *love*, LOVE!

What gets me so excited is that until the coming of Jesus Christ, there was no form of worship or religion that really was centered on love. The Old Covenant in the Old Testament was centered on the law. The emphasis was on obedience and regular blood sacrifices for the atonement of sin.

But Jesus said he marked the beginning of the New Covenant. And the New Covenant of love answers the two most important questions any person can ask:

What can I expect from God?

What does God expect from me?

And the answer to both questions is the same—*love*! God's grace is so great that he loves me even when I don't deserve it. And everything leading up to the cross and the crucifixion is the evidence of God's unfailing, unlimited, and sacrificial love for you and me. That's the message of the New Covenant!

God, I invite your transforming love to do its work in me. Amen.

THE GREATEST POSSIBILITY THINKER

Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.—Psalm 23:4

By all the laws of known psychological development, Jesus Christ should have become the world's greatest impossibility thinker. He was a member of a despised minority, a citizen of an occupied country, a Jew, and the world hated the Jews.

With the racial prejudice he experienced as a child, he should have grown up to be oversensitive, touchy, and defensive. Taxes were oppressive. Freedom was limited. Survival was uncertain. Religion was in the minor key—restrictive, negative, and joyless.

Yet Jesus never grew up to make an inflammatory speech, never organized a guerrilla force in the mountains, and never led a march on Rome.

He was uneducated, untraveled, and unhonored. He did not know the politicians or the other "important" people of his day. In fact, it was said of him that he attracted the losers, not the influential.

He lived and died in poverty. He had no home of his own, no insurance or retirement plan, and no wife to comfort him. But by the miracle of miracles, he grew up to be the world's greatest possibility thinker!

He believed in and proved the ultimate possibilities, such as: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who lives and believes in me shall never die!" And when he died, he *rose again!* And through his death, he lives to give life and meaning to each of us!

I live because Jesus lives!

THE CROSS

I will give him the honors of one who is mighty and great, because he has poured out his soul unto death.—Isaiah 53:12

What does the cross mean in your life? We wear gold or silver crosses around our necks as symbols of our faith. We place crosses on steeples of churches and in the front of our sanctuaries. But for Jesus, the cross was an instrument of suffering, pain, and death.

The tremendous possibilities of our faith are used by God as the means for turning a cruel instrument of death into a symbol of hope and life.

Think for a moment about the possibilities available to you today because of the cross of Jesus Christ. What does the cross mean in your life today? Meditate quietly, this Good Friday, on the significance the cross of Jesus Christ has in your life today.

In the cross of Christ I glory—not for its cruelty but for the hope and possibilities it symbolizes!

HOPE WAITS AT THE CROSS

As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—Galatians 6:14

Towering high above the converging freeways in Orange County is the one-hundred-foot-tall cross sitting on top of the Tower of Hope. Rising over two hundred fifty feet above the ground, it has a light that shines continuously—symbolizing the hope promised by Jesus Christ.

Pilots landing at Orange County Airport tell me they use our cross as a reference point, making certain they are in the right landing path. People lying in hospital beds in the County Medical Center look out their windows at the lighted cross. Many lives have been changed by its silent witness.

One night, just after midnight, a security guard making his rounds found a young woman lying unconscious in our parking lot. He called one of our New Hope counselors, asking for him to come and check on her.

The counselor came downstairs just as she was starting to babble. They carried her upstairs and gave her some coffee and wrapped her in a warm blanket. For four hours, this counselor stayed with this girl until she was coherent. As she was leaving to receive medical attention, she said to the counselor, "I knew that if I could just get to the cross, I would find help."

My friend, the cross is where each of us must come to find the answer to our deepest needs. At the cross, help is always available!

I come to the cross, and I meet Jesus. He fills my soul with courage and strength.

COME-ALIVE POWER

I am leaving with you a gift—peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.—John 14:27

Even to a possibility thinker, there are some things that are impossible. For someone to stand at the beginning of a day and prevent the sun from coming up by saying, "Today you shall not make your sweeping sail through the sky," is an impossibility! Or for someone to go to the seashore and draw a line in the sand at low tide to keep the sea back—"Today you shall not rise above this line"—is an impossibility.

For the Roman soldiers to put a stone in front of the tomb where Jesus was laid and say, "You shall never rise again!" was an impossibility! In the same way, it is impossible for you to invite Christ into your life and not receive his *come-alive power*! The sun will shine, the tide will rise, and Christ is alive—and when he comes into your life, you will receive power!

Christ gives *come-alive power*! Perhaps some of you have never experienced this dynamic peace. It can happen! You can know this power in your life!

It is impossible for me not to know Christ's come-alive power in my life today!

A MANUAL
OF
LENTEN PROGRAMS
(First Series)

by Jim Glycer

Additional material by
George Kennedy
Dean 1960 & 1961

F O R W A R D

This Lenten Manual is written and compiled to fulfill the requirements of the U.F.M.C.C. for an ordination paper.

Section II contains material originally developed for MCCLA, for use during Lent 1975. The success of that Lenten program was such that a Family ministry developed. Section III contains samples of Family materials, administrative papers, and promotional materials for the original Lenten series. Section I was written next. A letter was sent by myself to all churches in the Fellowship, offering to share copies of our 1975 Lenten material, together with a "How-to" section, with any church requesting it. Section I is the "How-to" section. To date 25 churches have requested copies of the Manual. Section IV contains the materials which have been developed for the 1976 Lenten series in MCCLA.

These materials ---- and the program for which they are a vehicle ---- have proved to be a spiritual blessing in MCCLA. It is my prayer that they will prove equally useful to other churches and study groups in the Fellowship.

James A. Glyer

----- INTRODUCTION -----

The program described in this Manual was conducted during Lent of 1975 at MCCLA. It was so highly successful that another such series is being developed for Lent of 1975.

The Lenten Living Room Groups were designed to provide an opportunity for intimacy where mutual trust and a loving Christian environment would develop. Many of the participants expressed the feeling that it was one of the spiritual highlights of their entire lives.

Persons of widely different theological positions were comfortable sharing together in the same loving and caring groups. The emphasis in the Lenten series is on "Relational Theology". Those participating are led to relate on a level of honesty and trust to (a) their own inner selves, (b) others in the group, and (c) God. An examination of the material will show why this is so. You can expect very exciting and meaningful things to happen to your people during the Lenten series.

This Manual spells out quite explicitly the procedures used in the program at MCCLA. It will need to be adapted to your local situation. However, there is a difference between adapting and changing. The program as developed works! Unless you have had extensive experience in small group dynamics, I recommend that you use it much as it is.

The Manual is divided into three parts:

- A. The instructions (yellow).
- B. The sheets for the six sessions (varicolored).
- C. Sample of letters, Leaders' Training Sheets, publicity, Family Programs, etc., (white).

Read the whole Manual through to get a total picture of the resources you have to work with. Reproduce the six Program sheets so that your Leaders may have their own copies of the material for the six sessions. Give these out to them, one sheet at a time, at the close of each Training Session. You may need to reproduce some of the other pages for persons on your Committee (i.e., publicity material for Publicity Chairperson). In order to save postage, the materials are being mailed loose. Immediately put them in a binder. Give out copies ---- never let the original material out of your hands.

I am asking each of you to send me a report at the close of the series. I particularly invite your suggestions for improvements. Several of you have offered to pay for the material. That will not be necessary. I am happy to give you the gift of this Manual. May God bless and guide your church in its use.

Jim Glyer

I. RECRUITING LEADERS

To recruit the right leaders, and recruit them effectively, your head has to be "right: --- you must know (1) Exactly what you are asking them to do, (2) the level of commitment you will require from any who accept your invitation, and (3) that you are paying a great tribute to anyone you invite to serve as a Leader. It is a great honor to be selected.

Let me develop these three points:

1. You are asking Leaders to take training for six weeks in order that they may lead a group for the six weeks of Lent. A Leader is not the person equipped to answer all questions (biblical and/or other), not the group psychiatrist, not the entertainer. A Leader is a sensitive, loving enabler who helps each member of the group to share maximally. By their own honest sharing and "gut" level participation, they set a tone that makes it possible for others to share on an honest "gut" level.
2. You are asking them to make this experience a top priority. Nothing is to prevent their participation at each Training and Lenten event that would not be serious enough to prevent them from going to their daily job. This must be true for you, also.
3. You are offering potential Leaders a remarkable opportunity for growth and service. Such an opportunity can be offered only to the most qualified. It is a great compliment to be invited to serve as a Lenten Leader.

Leaders work in teams. They alternate weeks, serving as Leader one week, and Co-Leader the next. Try to balance teams out for complimentary strengths. It would be good to team a man with a woman, a youth with a senior citizen, a gregarious person with someone who is quiet and thoughtful, etc. Experience has shown that it is not good to team lovers together --- though they may require some "selling" on this point.

Estimate how many groups you will be setting up. Groups should be no larger than 8 to 10 members, plus the 2 Co-Leaders, so that they can meet in living rooms. Recruit an extra leader or two for emergencies that are likely to come up.

Spend some real time in prayer asking that the Lord bring to your mind the individuals the Lord wants to have serve Him in this manner. You will be surprised at some of the names that will be brought to your mind.

Start right away! The first Lenten meetings will happen in the week between March 4 and March 10. This means the first training session will begin in the week between January 22 and January 28. People of the caliber you will ask to serve as Leaders may have to do some adjusting of their schedule. The more time you can allow them for this, the greater the likelihood that they can say "yes" when asked.

Even if you are busy, don't delay recruiting until next week.

Start immediately to pray and to list down the persons you want to approach.

II. TRAINING SESSIONS

The Training Sessions are very important. To a large extent, they will be the model for the actual Lenten groups. Therefore, time spent on a high quality Training series will pay off in high quality Lenten Groups.

Who is the Trainer(s)?

It may be the Pastor; it may be someone(s) named by the Pastor. The Pastor should realistically evaluate his/her own situation in terms of at least these factors:

1. His/her time schedule. The trainer(s) should make the Lenten Program a top priority and give it the time required.
2. The availability of other qualified persons who could be named as Trainer(s). Don't forget to consider some persons who are part of the Community, but not a member of your church. Often such persons are willing to be of assistance. A word of warning, -- such an individual needs to accept the basically Christian intent of the program --- particularly such features as the prayer list.
3. The Pastor's ability to let go of a project that he/she has turned over to someone else and still keep in touch with what is going on.

A TYPICAL SESSION

1. Contact everyone by telephone or in person a day or two before the first session to make sure they are coming, and that they know the starting time and location of the meeting.
2. Start on time. Train your people from the beginning to start on time and end on time. Two hours (probably 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.) should be enough time. At the latest, members should be free to leave for home by 10:00 p.m.
3. Have the room well set up. Eliminate clutter, put chairs in a circle arrangement so that everyone can see everyone else easily, check the temperature and light level --- these little details are important. Have all needed supplies on hand -- (blank cards for the prayer list, pencils, Bible, etc.).
4. Have name tags ready and use some such conversation-starter on the name tags such as "When did you first come out?", "Where were you born?", a line from 1 to 100 showing how far out of the closet you are, etc.
5. If you serve refreshments, have them early. At least on the first night, serve them at the beginning of the meeting --- it will help to break the ice.
6. Opening prayer. It is a good idea to ask someone in the group to do this. Give them plenty of warning.
7. Have the Scripture read. Whoever reads it should practice it aloud ahead of time so there is no embarrassing stumbling over words.

II. Training Sessions (continued)

8. Give the material in the Summary section as naturally as possible. Don't be "page-bound". Read the material until you are familiar with it. Underlining what you consider to be the key words and ideas will help.
9. Begin answering the questions. The Leader always goes first. He/she models for the group and sets the tone for the whole discussion. If the Leader is honest, the group will be honest. This role of the Leader as a Model is one of the keys to the success of the program. Following the Leader's answer, the others answer in turn. The Leader needs to hold down the dominators and encourage the shy ones. The techniques for doing this should be discussed with and by the Leaders at least several times before the series starts.
10. The first night, make up the Prayer List. Experience has shown that the Prayer List is the most important single feature of the Lenten Program. Distribute blank cards (4" x 6") or paper, and pencils. The Leader or Co-Leader starts by telling of some need of hers/his that she/he wants to ask the group to uphold in daily prayer. Everyone writes down the Leader's name and the prayer request. Continue on around the circle until everyone has listed a prayer request. Explain to those present that the group will come alive for them at least once a day as they pray for each person on the prayer list. Individuals are to pray in whatever way is real for them. It is essential to mobilize the prayer power of every individual in the group.

Prayer requests should be specific and personal. To pray for a sick parent, a lover, a new job, etc., is far better than to pray for such general objectives as world peace, unemployment, or a cure for cancer. Prayer requests should be of such a nature that it is relatively easy to see if the prayer has been answered.

Beginning the second week, either after the opening prayer or after the discussion has ended, come the reports from each member on what has happened with their individual prayer request. Great anticipation builds up. If I have prayed for you every day for a week, I am eager to learn what has happened. Our people were delighted to experience that God answers prayer. Group members grow in the life of prayer in a most exciting way. This is one of the most positive results of the Lenten program.

11. Gather in a circle for the final prayer ---- either holding hands or with arms on each others' shoulders. The Leader directs everyone to pray silently for the person on the right, and then for the person on the left. Following this, the Leader says something like: "We take it for granted everyone in this group prays. We are now going to have circle prayer, in which each will pray in turn. Some may prefer to pray silently. If you do, please end your prayer by saying 'Amen' out loud so that the person next to you may then begin their prayer. Many of you will prefer to share your prayers aloud so that others may be helped by them. We will begin the prayer circle with _____ and go around clockwise."
12. Refreshments ---- if you have not already had them.

II. Training Sessions (continued)

13. Leave for home early enough so those who work tomorrow can have the rest they need. Resist the temptation to stay on and chat. It was our experience that we lost members who stayed late and did not get their proper night's sleep. Adjourn in 2 to 2½ hours.
14. If someone misses attending the group the Leaders should:
 - A. While the Prayer List is being made up at the meeting, include that person's name on the list, with whatever prayer need seems appropriate.
 - B. Contact the missing member within 24 hours. Let them know they were missed (be tactful enough so they don't feel as though they are being checked up on). Give them the prayer list and express the hope they will be with you next week.

Adapting Training to Your Church:

The original program was developed in a large church. Many of the details will have to be adapted for smaller churches. It is hoped that there will be a Workshop in Washington, D.C. next summer where we can share with one another. Then we can learn of the various creative solutions that have been worked out.

It is important that all of your Leaders be exposed to the actual materials and procedures they will use with their own Lenten Living Room Group. At the very least, if you have too few Leaders in training to make a Training Group practical, get the Leaders together to hold a read-through and talk-through of materials and procedures. This will greatly increase their sense of security and result in a far stronger Lenten Program for your church.

III. PUBLICITY

Two basic rules apply to Publicity:

1. Be imaginative. Try some new ideas. Here are a few that worked for us:
 - A. Sandwich boards with eye-catching phrases.
 - B. Placards such as are used in demonstrations.
 - C. Well-made posters. Put some of these out in the wider Community where your people gather.
 - D. A small poster (3" x 12") hung around the necks of the Leaders with bright colored card saying "Sign up with me". This was done at the time that we were pushing for actual sign-ups.
 - E. Spot announcements by someone other than the Pastor at morning and evening services.

III. Publicity (continued)

F. A bulletin insert printed on bright paper, giving name of Leaders, locations and nights of meetings, information about the Lenten Series and directions for signing up. One of these is reproduced (minus the splashy color) with the materials.

2. Extend your publicity over a long period of time. Begin early with some teasers that intrigue, but don't give it away ---- i.e., "Guess what's coming", "You will be glad if you do", "Try it -- you'll like it". As you get closer, get more specific.

A good theme for publicity is the concept of doing "something special" for Lent. Rather than negatively giving up something, positively do something ---- join a Lenten Group. Point out that it will make Easter very meaningful.

It is important that the series receive strong pulpit support. Members of your Board and other opinion-makers can help by agreeing to enthusiastically talk it up. Make it clear that the Lenten Series is something that no one would want to miss.

Get coverage in the local newspaper. This is the type of program that creates a good image for our church. Try to get that sort of image before your general Community. Consider local "throw-aways" as well as the major press. If there are local gay publications, use them.

Stress that the groups are open to anyone who would like to sign up. There are many in our Community who cannot yet bring themselves to attend a worship service who will respond positively to such a program. We now have a number of new members in MCCLA who first came to us through our Lenten groups. Unexpectedly, the Lenten series proved to be one of our most effective channels for outreach and evangelism. In our Communities, many of our people are turned on to small group experiences, but are not yet turned on to Christ. Your Living Room Discussion Program will draw a positive response ---- IF YOU COMMUNICATE.

IV. SIGN-UP

All of your publicity build-up has only one goal ---- to get their name on the dotted line! Beginning about February 15th, have an all-out campaign to sign people up.

Each pair of Co-Leaders signs up members for their group. The responsibility for the sign-up is clearly on the shoulders of the Co-Leaders. If they contact someone who cannot be in their group, take that prospective member personally to another Leader. With group meetings on different nights and in different areas of the city, nearly everyone should be able to find a group.

Someone who organizes well needs to correlate all of this activity, and serve as Registrar. The Registrar should keep a master list of all group sign-ups. We

IV. Sign-up (continued)

put the Registrar and his committee at a large desk in the lobby, under a large sign. No one coming to a worship service could miss seeing the Lenten Groups center. It is a good idea to have the number of sign-ups announced from time to time -- with appropriate flourishes.

Don't sign up more than the limit for any group. A week before the series starts each Co-Leader should contact everyone who has signed up to make sure they are still wanting a place reserved for them. This makes it seem important and weeds out names of those who were not really serious about it when they signed up.

V. ASH WEDNESDAY

The Lenten Series starts with the Ash Wednesday Service. If your church has not previously had such a service, this is a good time to begin such a tradition. Encourage everyone to come. Try to get Lenten groups to sit together. The Pastor can set the climate of expectation for all the groups by what he/she does in the Ash Wednesday service.

VI. LENTEN GROUP MEETINGS

Read again the "Training Session" section of this Manual. Lenten groups should be faithful copies of the Training group. Each group will take on a personality of it's own and adapt the overall program to the personalities in that group.

The Co-Leaders have responsibilities each evening. Here are some of the tasks for each role:

Leader A. Leads the discussion; keeps the group on schedule; directs the program part of the evening through to the closing prayer circle.

Leader B. Is the gracious host(ess); observes what is going on; makes suggestions to Leader A if appropriate and needed; helps with dominators and shy members; handles such housekeeping chores as delegating who brings refreshments the next week; takes care of latecomers, ringing telephone; etc.

Leaders are to share the responsibility for following up on absent members. At the meeting, Leader A and Leader B select their chairs strategically and sit on opposite sides of the circle. "B" should be nearer such possible points of interruption as the outside door and the telephone.

Sometime after the meeting, A and B should get together to evaluate. A good format for evaluation is:

1. What did we like about the meeting?

VI. Lenten Group Meetings (continued)

2. How could the meeting be improved upon?

VII. THE CLOSING SESSION (Session 6)

The climax of the Lenten Program is outlined on the sheet for Session Six. Particularly for this Session, follow the outline very closely.

Keep the meal simple. It is easy to lose minutes and hours fussing over an elaborate meal. If you do, the evening will run too late. Consider the possibility of using some of the prepared foods --- Colonel Sanders, H. Salt, McDonalds, etc. Get the meal under way by 6:30 or 6:45 p.m. Have fun with the meal, but don't linger too long.

Follow the exact wording as it is listed under the "Prayer List" section --- particularly B and D. The Leader or Co-Leader again begins, modeling honesty and openness. The comments of your people will be very moving.'

The form of the Communion Service is one which emphasizes the priesthood of all believers. Each member serves --- and is served by --- the person on either side. Plans will need to be made ahead to assure the presence of someone who is authorized to consecrate the elements. The sacramental elements, chalice, etc., should be either already set up or quickly available.

In our experience, this final session was unforgettable. Its impact remained. Such should be your experience also.

VIII. SUPERVISION & EMERGENCIES

The Trainer(s) become the Supervisor(s) once Lent begins. They should visit each group at least once. When visiting a group beware of taking over the meeting from the Leader and Co-Leader. Silently make your observations and participate in a low key as a member of the group. Afterwards, you can share your observations with the Leaders. Do so in a supportive and non-threatening manner. Point out good features before suggesting improvements. Give lots of reassurance.

You will probably be developing a new group of Leaders from the Lenten series. They will be an invaluable resource for the future. Therefore, it will repay you well to devote the needed time to both training and supervision. Many of those whom we trained last year in MCCLA have helped with subsequent small group experiences.

Emergencies will arise. Have one or two trained Leaders in reserve who can help to meet these emergencies. Remember, your entire Lenten Leadership team is part of your resources. You don't have to solve everything by yourself.

We found it necessary to have a weekly meeting (on Sunday afternoons) in order to keep everyone informed and get the word out about upcoming developments. It was

VIII. Supervision & Emergencies (continued)

required that either the Leader or the Co-Leader be present and give a brief report on their group. Often both were present. This weekly meeting was very important in keeping up morale and moving the Lenten Program forward.

IX. SERVICE OF WITNESS & CELEBRATION

The high experiences that had been shared by the participants in the Lenten Groups were shared by the entire congregation in a Service of Witness & Celebration. After much debate as to whether to have this service on Palm Sunday or on Easter, it was decided to hold it on Palm Sunday, during the evening service.

Each Lenten Group selected one person to give a personal witness about how meaningful the Lenten experience had been for them. For the most part, those chosen for the Witness were new persons who had never before appeared before the congregation.

Plan for some such type of public witness. Everyone will benefit --- those bringing the witness as well as those hearing it.

X. CONTINUING ON AFTER LENT

The success of the Lenten Program was evident by the second or third week. On every hand, people began to say, "This means so much to me. It can't stop with Easter."

After prayer and discussion, we felt led to follow up the Lenten Groups by Families ---- a more permanent and less structured group experience.

We have learned much from our nearly one year's experience with Families. If some of you indicate your interest (in letters) we will be glad to share some of what we have learned about developing a Family Program.

Be prepared in your thinking for the strong possibility that your people may want to carry the Lenten type experience on after Easter. Persons in our Community are often isolated and lonely, and developing some type of a small support group is an important ministry for the UFMCC. Included in the Materials Section of the Manual are some of the early Family announcements and resources.

XI. A WORKSHOP IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

If enough of you indicate an interest, the scheduling of a Workshop at the General Conference in Washington, D.C. might be requested of the Elders. At such

XI. A Workshop in Washington, D.C. (continued)

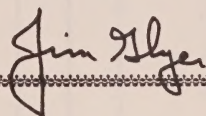
a Workshop, at least these goals might be achieved:

1. We could learn from one another as we share our experiences with Lenten Groups.
2. Other churches in the Fellowship would have the chance to explore the idea of holding a Lenten Series in 1977.
3. In addition to sharing our experiences with Lenten Groups, we could do another type of sharing. Each of your churches has probably developed one or more good programs that you could share. Some plan could be developed for this so that we genuinely strengthen one another in a most practical way.

XII. ON-GOING HELP

If I can be of any assistance to you as you develop your programs, let me know and I will do what I can. In addition to serving as the Minister of Education on the staff of MCCLA, I have a full time job at the LAC-USC Medical Center. This leaves me short on time, but, as I can, I will try to respond.

God Bless. You have a wonderful experience ahead of you.



FOOTNOTES

1. One Pastor who read part of the manuscript for the Manual asked about a bibliography. It is difficult to list one. I have found helpful material in a number of places, but I know of no books that are enough on target to recommend for purchase.

There is, however, one resource that I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically recommend to one and all. It is the magazine, "Faith at Work". I know of nothing like it. It is from the Faith at Work movement that I have learned much of what I know about small group dynamics for Christians. A card is enclosed which you could use for ordering this resource.

2. Some of you have already used the "Four Quaker Questions". If a majority of those you anticipate signing up for the Lenten Series have already used this device, you probably need to use another.

Should this prove to be the case for your church, I would be glad to send you a copy of what we will be using in MCCLA for our 1976 series. Write to me at 1237 Brunswick, South Pasadena, CA, 91030, and I will mail it to you.

REGISTRATION REPORT, Lenten Series

Leaders:

Meeting Night

Meeting Location

List Registrants ~~Alphabetically~~...List last name first.

*Please call Geo or Jerry to let us know where
you will meet from week to week. Thank you*

Name

Street

City

Zip

Telephone Number

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____

Instructions:

1. Please turn in by Sunday night if possible; if not, by Ash Wednesday.
Give to George Kennedy or Jerry Johnson.
2. Type or Print

LENTEN RENEWAL
Final Training Session

--- GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS ---

1. Assuming that the co-leaders will provide the first night's refreshments, work out a plan for sharing the next four refreshments and final "shared meal". Keep them simple only 2 items. Have them ready.
2. Have supplies on hand BEFORE opening session:
 - A. Name tags already made out large print.
 - B. Some device for interest How far out of closet? Where born? How long you expect to live? Etc.
 - C. 4 x 6 cards (or sheets of paper) for prayer lists.
 - D. A few spare pencils.
 - E. A Bible. Select person to read passage early enough to have him/her become familiar with it.
3. Contact each person in the group by telephone two or three days before the first session. Build up his/her expectation. Make sure she/he understands location and time. Stress being on time (or early).
4. Divide list between the leaders. Contact by phone anyone who is absent. Convey concern about her/his absence. Give brief resume of meeting. Give items on the prayer list. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT! Calls should be placed within 24 hours if possible.
5. Evaluate the meeting with your co-leader. Did all participate? Did some dominate? Was the sharing "gutsy" and real - or superficial? Did you stay within the time limits? What was particularly strong about the session. How could it be improved. Were the physical arrangements good? Is a real fellowship building? Did people have fun? Are some feeling like outsiders? Are cliques developing?
6. Have at least one of the co-leaders at the weekly report meetings.
7. Check your tools over. Do you have a good copy of the material to be used at each meeting? If not, get replacements.
8. In order to have a common experience in all groups, use the basic material which has been worked out for the series. Adapt the material to your own individual style and to the needs of the group. Practice reading the material aloud. (This will increase naturalness and make you less text bound).
9. Divide the leadership responsibility. In most groups, each leader will lead the discussion for three sessions. The co-leader has an important role also. He/she is responsible for ... (1) handling any situation that unexpectedly arises, (2) being aware of individual reactions in the group, and (3) helping with dominators or shy ones. The co-leader is not a mere passive observer.
10. The role of the leader as a model is essential. If the leader models honesty and openness, the group will reflect that.
11. Be aware of the clock. START ON TIME! Larger groups may need to reevaluate the suggested time periods. If you decide to run later, make that clear to the group. Dismiss by your deadline. Most people need to work the next day.
12. Do your best. No one can do better than that. All of us are human; all of us have limitations. Give it as good as you have got -- and trust God to use that.

...in which each may see the
...the...

First Prayer Conference

- a. Have each person pray silently for one minute.
- b. Then say your prayer aloud.
- c. Why did you pray for the people of the world?
- d. How did you feel about that and about you?

The leader gives questions one at a time, "building" the answer
first. Each answer is the circle answer in turn. When needed,
the leader encourages more detailed answers.

Prayer Conference Time. The leader distributes two cards for silent
prayer to each person present. Each person receives a card. Each
one writes his own prayer that which he/she takes home for silent
prayer. Beginning with the leader, each person says his/her name
and states what that person is praying for. The group is to be praying about the
himself that was said. Each person is to pray for a personal level (praying about
myself, my job, my school, my family, etc.) and to be far more
concerned with the needs of the world.

SECTION II

"1975 LENTEN MATERIAL"

At the center, and all other times, it is to be given for
reporting what happened in the center for which the person
received prayer. Reports should be given at the beginning of the
week and at the end of the week.

Prayer Prayer Circle. After each group has had an opportunity
to pray with each other in each circle.

- a. Have each person pray silently for the people in his right.
- b. Have each person pray silently for the people in his left.
- c. Working with the leader, each person in the circle prays.
The group is to pray for each other and for the world. Each person
is to pray for the people in his right and left. Each person is to pray
for the people in his right and left. Each person is to pray for the
people in his right and left. Each person is to pray for the people
in his right and left. Each person is to pray for the people in his
right and left. Each person is to pray for the people in his right
and left. Each person is to pray for the people in his right and left.

Prayer Conference and Prayer Circle. Prayers everywhere. This is
a " Lenten" with no Lenten. Because the Lenten is not for the
people of the world but for the people of the world. A place for prayer
time, a " Lenten" time each, etc. It is Lenten if each person is
praying for the people of the world. Each person is to pray for the
people of the world. Each person is to pray for the people of the world.
Each person is to pray for the people of the world. Each person is to
pray for the people of the world. Each person is to pray for the people
of the world. Each person is to pray for the people of the world.

Prayer. Leave your heart's heart to God at the Lenten. Each
the Lenten is to pray for the people of the world. Each person is to
pray for the people of the world. Each person is to pray for the people
of the world. Each person is to pray for the people of the world.

Note: The Lenten is to be a time of prayer for the people of the world.
Each person is to pray for the people of the world. Each person is to
pray for the people of the world. Each person is to pray for the people
of the world. Each person is to pray for the people of the world.

7:30 p.m. I. Open with prayer. Have group in circle where each may see the other without strain. Co-Leaders sit opposite other.

II. Four Quaker Questions:

- A. Where did you live between the ages of 8 and 12?
- B. How was your house heated?
- C. Who and/or where was the center of warmth in your home?
- D. When did you first know that God loved you?

The leader gives questions one at a time, "modeling" the answer first. Each member in the circle answers in turn. Where needed, the leader encourages more detailed answers.

8:30 III. Prayer Request Time. The leader distributes 4x6 cards (or slips of paper) to each person present. Have spare pencils ready. Each person writes his own prayer list which he/she takes home for daily prayer. Beginning with the leader, each person says his/her name and states what that person wants the group to be praying about for him/her that week. Keep the needs at a personal level (praying about my lover, my job, my mother's operation, etc. tends to be far more basic than praying for world peace or the unemployment situation.

At the second, and all subsequent sessions, time is to be given for reporting what happened relative to the matter for which the person requested prayer. Experience shows that this becomes one of the most meaningful parts of the whole experience.

IV. Closing Prayer Circle. Either have the group hold hands or stand in a circle with arms holding those on each side.

- 1. Have each person pray silently for the person on his right.
- 2. Have each person pray silently for the person on his left.
- 3. Starting with the leader, each person in the circle prays. Some may choose to pray aloud and share their prayer with others. Some may choose to pray silently. Those who pray silently are to say a clear "Amen" at the end of their prayer as a signal to the next person that he/she has finished praying. In time, most of the group should come to pray aloud.

9:00 V. Light Refreshments and conversation. Include everyone. This is a "family" with no outsiders. Decide how you want to pay for the refreshments (each take a turn bringing them), a plate for contributions, a "fee" from each, etc.). It is better if each person has some part in contributing to the whole. This same principle applies for the meal that the group is to share at least once during the Lenten period.

9:30 VI. Adjourn. Leave your host's home by 10:00 at the latest!!! Resist the temptation to stay on and chat. You will be glad the next morning that you did.

Note: The above schedule is to be followed in general. Vary from it when there is a good reason for doing so. Some prefer to start with light refreshments. Use your judgment.

CRIPPLED AT THE KING'S TABLE

Scriptural Content: 2 Samuel 9:1-13

After the death of Saul and Jonathan in a battle with the Philistines at Mount Gilboa, David assumed the throne of Israel. After he had "settled in", he raised the question in our story. "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

There was one surviving son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, a cripple. The story of Mephibosheth is told in *2 Samuel*, 4:4. He was a boy of five when the bad news came from Mt. Gilboa. His nurse picked him up and in the haste to flee the palace dropped him, crippling his feet.

David made room for Mephibosheth in his palace. The sick and the crippled may have been shown a compassion in Israel which they were not accorded elsewhere, but they weren't usually treated in a very kingly manner.

But, the story tells us, Mephibosheth "ate always at the king's table" and "was lame in both his feet."

APPLICATION

The Christian faith proclaims the miracle of healing, and we are encouraged to press toward health and wholeness.

Despite our healthy concern for being made whole, all of us carry about with us various kinds of lameness which will probably stay with us as long as we live.

"The church", said Kierkegaard, "is a hospital". In one sense we may call it a hospital for incurables. In this life no one will be perfected, no matter how eager or persevering.

That is the point with our story. The gospel is that we may eat at the King's table even though we are lame in both our feet.

One feels the truth of this as one gets older. There are weaknesses we thought we would outgrow, stupidities we thought we could transcend. But we remain cripples.

Yet, miracle of miracles, God accepts us, and His loving family accepts us. They may get impatient with our stumbling feet, our self-pity, and our rationalizations; but when the table is set, there is always a place for us.

There used to be an interpretation of this text which made Jonathan a Jesus figure. Mephibosheth was shown kindness for Jonathan's sake; we are accepted because of Jesus. That's an acceptable interpretation. Jesus makes it OK for me to dangle my crippled feet under the King's table. There is space in God's home for me - just as I am.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you regard our church as a hospital? What difference would it make if our members had such an attitude.
2. What "lameness" do you have which doesn't seem to yield to change or healing?
3. In your search for wholeness, what particular weakness do you see yourself dealing with effectively?
4. How do you feel about sharing this "lameness" honestly with a group of caring people?

HOW ARE WE MADE OVER?

Scriptural Content: Acts 8:26-40

The story of the encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza illustrates for us the problem of the transmission of the gospel -- how do you make disciples? Or, put another way, (1) how are people freed to become new in Christ and (2) what role do we play in that.

APPLICATION

In reviewing the history of the Christian Church, it becomes clear that our way of making disciples has included many different steps. We have called and trained witnesses, and we have sent them forth to win and to baptize Christian disciples. We have proclaimed our faith in the work of the Holy Spirit, and we have encouraged our converts to be free and joyful.

But if this is so, why is it that so few people seem to be "new" and to experience that "wow" of joy which is the gift of the Holy Spirit?

There is certainly no problem with our explanation of the biblical word. It is, without doubt, textually correct and doctrinally sound.

What then is the difficulty? Could it be the explainer? Could it be that the explainer of the word which promises to give people newness of life has not himself experienced it?

In the early months of 1738, when John Wesley came home after two years as an Anglican missionary in Georgia, he said, "I went to America to convert the heathen, but I found that I myself had not been converted to God." It was only after his heart had been "strangely warmed" in Aldersgate Street, May 24, 1738, that he could write, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and had saved me from the law of sin and death."

The emphasis is upon me, my, and mine. To make disciples is to be personal. Philip climbed into the Ethiopian's chariot, and although we do not know what he said in detail, we may be sure that he talked about the significance of Jesus and His death for him (Philip).

QUESTIONS:

1. *What one person has been the best explainer of the gospel to you, and what in his or her explanation was most effective.*
2. *After his re-birth, or as part of it, the Ethiopian was baptized. Baptism is death and resurrection with our Lord. To what old thing do you need to die, and to what new thing do you need to be committed in the power of the Spirit?*

COVER-UP

Scriptural Content: Genesis 3:7-13

Sin is transgression of a command. Sin is also concealment of what we have done. We are guilty and we feel ashamed. We are afraid to be discovered, and we try to conceal our nakedness with some hurry-up defense. Sin is inventive. "They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons." First the transgression, and then the concealment, lead to a broken relationship with God and with other people. The final step is blaming. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent.

Out of transgression, shame, fear, concealment, broken relationships, and projection of guilt on others, come enmity, pain, cursing, thorns and thistles, and a cruel and meaningless life.

The way back to relationship with God and with others has been provided by God in Jesus. Because of Jesus we dare admit who we are and what we do and how we feel. We dare be open with one another. "If we confess ... he is faithful and just to forgive ... and to cleanse." (*1 John 1:9*).

And "if we live in the light just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."

APPLICATION

During the Senate investigation of Watergate the word "cover-up" was used very frequently. "Covering up" is an unusually common life style in our community.

In one way or another we are all guilty of "cover-up". The question is not if our cover-up is big and dramatic and has an effect on the nation, but if it has an effect on us. For example, a pastor once confessed that he stole sermons and never developed his own. The effect on him was a drying up of creativity and a sense of producing nothing but "thorns and thistles".

The gospel is not that we need to confess to everybody, but that we need to confess to sombody. We need to tell someone "This is the way it is for me." Sometimes the "someone" is the person (or persons) we have wronged, sometimes it is not. Indiscriminate confession often meets only our own neurotic needs, and absolute openness can be very destructive. But, in spite of these hazards, all of us need to pray for more openness and less cover-up.

And the gospel is, "If we confess, He will forgive and cleanse."

QUESTIONS:

1. Is it difficult for you to confess your faults to another person?
2. Does the General Confession often used in the Communion service give you a sense of release?
3. Share with the group a meaningful experience of either extending or receiving forgiveness --- not the lurid details - but the process. What made this experience different?

THE FREEDOM OF FRIENDSHIP

Scriptural Content: Philemon

The letter of Paul to Philemon has something useful to tell us about the dynamics of Christian friendship or brotherliness/sisterliness.

The situation was, briefly, this. Paul was imprisoned, and while there he made the acquaintance of Onesimus, a slave of Collosae, and was instrumental in bringing him to faith. It has been assumed that Onesimus was a runaway slave, but the text is not explicit on this point. Whatever the case, Paul has encouraged Onesimus to return to his master and sends this brief letter with him. We don't know if Philemon complied with Paul's request for Onesimus.

What is particularly significant in this text is how Paul handles relationships. He begins by affirming Philemon and the friendship, indicating how much it has meant to him.

He continues by asking Philemon to do something for him. The Apostle makes this request without manipulating or forcing Philemon. He could have used his apostolic authority, or he could have hooked Philemon by playing on the latter's sympathy. But he does neither. On the other hand, he does not leave either his apostleship or his previous service to Philemon out of the reckoning. In other words, he is not hyper-humble. He is refreshingly human.

What emerges is a triad of people, each one free to be himself and yet each one interdependent. Philemon needs Paul and Onesimus. Paul needs both Philemon and Onesimus. Onesimus needs Philemon and Paul. Each one needs the other, but each one stands fast in the freedom with which Christ has made him free.

APPLICATION

In reviewing my own friendships I find myself wavering between interdependence and dependency. Among some people I maintain a kind of uncreative aloofness; with others I go overboard, either asking too much of them or trying to do too much for them. I find myself needing some people so much that I make them dependent upon me. Then, when they express the needs I have encouraged in them, I feel resentful and am tempted to cop out on the relationship. What I need to work on is the honoring of the other person and myself to the point where I can recognize both the beauty and freedom of personhood and the joy of mutual support.

1. *With what one person do I now have a free, supportive relationship which allows me to ask for help and to offer help without playing the role of Lord or Lady Bountiful (patronizing) or the role of Obedient Servant (ingratiating).*
2. *Into which of these relationships do I find myself most often slipping?*
 - A. *The role of generous authority figure ("I'll pick up the tab")*
 - B. *Frenzied servant ("Let me do that for you")*
 - C. *Overly grateful receiver ("Oh thank you, kind sir, thank you!")*
 - D. *Acutely humble bumbler ("Forgive me, pardon me, excuse me, I didn't mean to")*
3. *What further concrete steps do I want to take in my friendships which will help me be a loving and beloved friend?*

PLAN FOR THE EVENING

6:45 p.m.

Shared dinner

8:00 p.m.

Prayer List:

- A. Report on last week's prayer targets
- B. What is my most basic need today?
- C. Make new prayer list - Commitment until Easter
- D. What has been best for me in this experience?

9:00 p.m.

SPECIAL COMMUNION *Consecration of Elements*

Each member is to break a small piece of bread from the french roll and feed it to the person on his right, saying "*This is Christ's body, broken for you.*"

Each member is to hold the cup for the person on his left, saying "*This is Christ's blood, shed for you.*"

9:45 p.m.

CLOSING PRAYER CIRCLE

Stand in a circle, arms around each other. Pray silently for the person on the left, and then for the person on the right. Begin to the left of the leader with usual pattern for spoken or silent prayer.

SECTION III

"PROMOTIONAL, ADMINISTRATIVE,
AND
FAMILY RESOURCES MATERIAL"

January 2, 1975

Dear Larry,

Thank you for responding to my invitation.

I am excited about the possibilities for the upcoming Lenten Renewal Groups. This could be one of your most meaningful experiences in 1975.

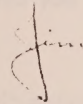
You may remember that when I invited you to share in this Lenten series, I said you would be receiving a letter. This is it. Other than enclosing a copy of the article which I have written for the February 1975 issue of New Life, I will not try to outline the general plans for the Lenten series. That will be done at this Sunday's meeting.

It is essential that you be present for the meeting this Sunday ----- and that you be on time! We will meet in the Seminary Room at 5:00 p.m. Please bring a notebook and pencil so that you can take permanent notes.

The key to a successful Lenten program is leadership. You are part of that key. Only those who are fully trained will be ready for a successful leadership. Therefore, only those who are disciplined enough to be trained can share in the leadership.

Your training will start this Sunday at 5:00 p.m. I am counting on your being there. It will be great to share this experience with you.

Sincerely,



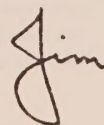
To the Thirty-Three Leaders of the Lenten Livingroom Groups:

We have nearly reached the end of the training period. Shortly, you will have the opportunity to serve in the leadership capacity for which you have been trained. Please give the following points your attention:

1. We meet this Sunday night at 6:00 in the Seminary Room. Bring your materials with you. If any items need replacement, you can get them. Sit with your partner. Part of the hour will be given to planning by the Team Leaders.
2. Call all of the people on your registration list to confirm their reservation. We now have a waiting list. If any drop out, those on the waiting list will take their place. Start calling tonight if you can. That will allow for a margin of time in case some of your registrants prove hard to reach.
3. By 10:00 Sunday morning report your corrected totals to Virgil at the desk in the lobby. I am sure that we will need to pool our efforts before and after the morning and evening services this Sunday to assist with getting registrants for those few groups who will have openings. Check with Richard at the desk to find out what we need to have your help with.
4. Attached is a Registration Report. Turn it in to Virgil by this Sunday night if possible. If this should prove impossible because of last minute adjustments to your list, turn it in by Wednesday Night at the Ash Wednesday Service.
5. Plan to attend the Ash Wednesday Service and urge your registrants to do the same. This is actually the official start of our Lenten program. There will be a special time of dedication of the Lenten Team Leaders.
6. Some of you missed the first training session where we used the Four Quaker Questions. If you were one of those who missed that session (some of you had a choir conflict, some were ill, and some of you joined the Leadership Team since that first session) come to the Seminary Room at 5:00 this Sunday and we will give a summary of material covered in the first session which you missed.
7. Thank you for your cooperation thus far. I feel that you are about to have one of the important experiences of your life.

Both Lee Carlton and Don Pederson are enthusiastic about our Lenten program for Living Room groups. I feel that the entire denomination will become aware of what we are doing. Most important, I feel that the Lord will bless our efforts.

Lovingly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jim", written in a cursive style.

To all leaders of the Lenten Discussion Groups;

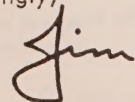
Let me begin by rejoicing with you over the glowing reports that I am receiving on every hand about your groups. Obviously, the Spirit is at work in and through you. Praise God!!!!

We are having a very important meeting this Sunday (March 2) and I am asking that EVERYONE be present---both partners from each team. Because we have so much of importance to decide, the meeting will start half an hour earlier---at 5:30. Please be on time----or a bit early. Among the topics that we will deal with are:

1. In light of our experience with this series, what have we learned for the future about how best to secure firm reservations? What would we do another time that we did not think to do this time? How can we develop a firm sense of commitment among our people? Admittedly, we have a long way to go but let's get started in the right direction.
To give us statistical data to work with, please fill out the attached form. In giving all figures, include the leaders along with the registrants. Give your sheet to Virgil at the desk in the lobby before the service this Sunday morning.
2. What is the best size for groups? We seem to be running an attendance from 5 to 15 in our various groups. When is a group too small or too large? What are we learning about adapting to various sized groups?
3. An "Interest Finder" has been developed by the Council on Growth to help us know what our people are interested in. Instructions and a supply for your group will be given out at the Sunday's meeting.
4. On March 9th the Council on Growth is meeting to discuss what will happen to the Groups after Easter. We will discuss this at some length at Sunday's meeting. They want to get your ideas and those of your group. Come prepared with some ideas on this matter.
5. As usual, there will be time for brief reports from each group. How is your group doing? How would you characterize your group? 'Paulette observed at last week's meeting that each group has a distinct personality. What is your group like?
6. Plans have been made for a concluding Service of Witness and Celebration to be held on either Palm Sunday or Easter night. We want to tell you more about this so you can include it in your personal plans.
7. New business.

As you can see, the meeting this Sunday at 5:30 will cover many important topics. We need to have you there so that we can benefit from your thinking and so that you can keep abreast of developments. Thanks for the great job that you are doing.

Lovingly,



January 7, 1975

Dear Lenten Leader:

I wish that I had time to make this a personal note to you. Since that is out of the question, will you do me a favor and regard it as though it were a personal letter to just you? This letter deals with three matters: 1. This Sunday's meeting, 2. The Training Groups, 3. A basic requirement for success.

1. MEETING THIS SUNDAY:

We will meet from 5:30 to 6:30 this Sunday (January 12) in the Seminary Room. At this meeting we will work out the teams (including their locations and nights for meeting), discuss publicity (I have an idea I'd like to share with you---bring your ideas to share also), and discuss how handle two categories of participants (the dominators and the quiet ones).

This is the second of your six training meetings-----it is a MUST meeting.

2. TRAINING GROUPS:

The three Training Groups fell into place quite easily. This is your official notification about your group.

Sunday Group: Meets in Seminary Room at 4:00 on Sunday. Jan. 19, 26, Feb. 2, 9
William Binkley, Alan Ferrill, Brenda Hunt, Eric Hultquist, Maury Johnson, Jeff Matthews, Brien McCarthy, June Norris, Jim Wallace, Dick White.

Tuesday Group: Seminary Room. 7:30. Jan 14, 21, 28, Feb. 4
Mike Arbuckle, Lucia Chappelle, Brenda Cromartie, Terry Foster, Steve Jordan, Mary Leiser, Randy Miller, Daniel Padnos, Ben Rodermond, Terry Willis,

Wednesday Group: Lower Social Hall. 7:30. Jan 15, 22, 29, Feb 5.
Fred Conwell, Richard Davidson, Flo Fleischman, Virgil Hendershot, Bob Johnson, Larry Long, Sandi Loree, Larry Rodriguez, Earl Schmidt, Jane Carl.

The Sunday group will need to reschedule their meeting for Jan. 19th because of the congregational meeting. Come to this Sunday's session having checked your personal calendar so that another date can be arranged for the Jan 19th meeting.

3. A BASIC REQUIREMENT FOR SUCCESS:

It is very simple.

Be on time!!!! When we started last Sunday afternoon, 18 were on time. The others? Good stewardship of time means that we can be counted on to begin and end when we say that we will. This will be an important item for the group that you will be leading. Sunday's meeting will start at 5:30.

I look forward to a highly successful experience. I am glad that you are part of it.

Sincerely,

March 11, 1975

Dearly Beloved:

Here we are, nearly at the end of our Lenten series. What a glorious experience it has been!!!! Thank you for all that you have done to make it go so well. Sometime soon, I would like to gather us all together for a time of evaluation and fun. If any of you have some ideas on this, let me know----where, when, what, etc.

Please read carefully the material in this letter. Essential steps in successfully bring your group to a conclusion are covered. The first three items are before Easter items and the last two are after Easter items.

THE SERVICE OF WITNESS AND CELEBRATION is set for Palm Sunday night---March 23rd. Plans call for each Lenten Group to sit together as a total group. Let Larry Rodriguez know that morning how many seats to reserve for your group. There will be a sign for your group bearing the Leader's names. Tell your people to look for your sign and sit there. We hope to have 100% attendance in ALL groups (that would include your's). Each group is to select one of its members to speak for not over three minutes, bearing witness to something that is meaningful to that person or his/her group. These witnesses will be given from the pulpit. After each of the sixteen groups have been heard from, individuals will have the opportunity to give a witness----as time permits. We are inviting the congregation to be our guests in the Social Hall after the service. The groups which meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are asked to bring "munchables"---cake, cookies, etc. The groups meeting on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday are asked to bring beverage. Bring a quantity sufficient for three times the size of your group. Each group is to appoint one person to represent them and serve as hosts in the Social Hall, serving the food and handling clean-up. Fred Conwell will be in charge of the groups who are serving as hosts.

YOUR FINAL NIGHT WITH YOUR GROUP. If there is a Deacon, Pastor, or Exhorter in your group, that person will be used for consecrating and distributing the elements. If not, Howard Barr is to assign someone for your group. Contact him at church this Sunday about your need. A word of caution, handle the dinner in such a way that it does not take undue time or effort. You don't want the evening overshadowed by a late dinner that puts pressure on the rest of the evening's activities. Review carefully the sheet with instructions for Session Six. If you have any questions about the procedure, ask either Paulette or myself.

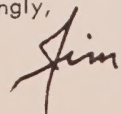
THERE WILL BE NO MORE SIX O'CLOCK REPORT MEETINGS. However, it is still important to get a report to Betsy of your attendance so that we can have an accurate total record of our whole project.

FAMILIES. The Lenten Groups are to lead into Families. You will be hearing lots about this development. Paulette and I will get in touch with the Leaders of the eight groups that we have each worked with to discuss how your group will make the transition to Families. April has been designated by Jim Sandmire as Family month. Watch for the Family page in New Life. It is to be regularly found on the inside of the back page. The Family page will have resources for Family meetings and suggestions for family activities.

AFTER EASTER EVENTS SCHEDULED: 1. On Saturday, April 12, there will be a seven hour Retreat held at the church from 10:00 to 5:00. Each person is to bring a sack lunch. Small groups will be an important aspect of this experience. Dick Mickley is chairman. 2. Monday Nights. Beginning with the second Monday in April, there will regularly be Monday night programs at the church featuring a speaker and discussion. For April the topic is "Meet Jim Sandmire". Encourage your people to participate in both of these post-Easter activities.

Again, thanks for all of your help.

Lovingly,



March 25, 1975

Dear Lenten Group Leader:

Last Sunday afternoon the Council on Christian Growth held a very important three hour meeting. We had the privilege of having our new Pastor with us. As a result of their discussions, they asked me to communicate with you. This letter, therefore, is really from them. Basically, there are four items to bring to your attention:

1. The matter of making the transition from Lenten Groups to Families was discussed at length. It was agreed that each Lenten Group needed to be handled on an individual basis. Also, it was agreed that each Lenten Group would be in the best position to decide how its members would make the transition to the new Family groupings.

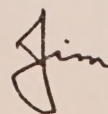
Please discuss this matter with your Lenten Group. We realize that this will involve most of you in calling a special meeting of your Lenten Group. The Council realizes that this will put an additional burden on you. However, if the positive results which were achieved by your leadership in the Lenten Groups is to be preserved, one final responsible act will be needed.

2. Fred Conwell is chairman of the Family Committee. Paulette Heron and Steve Jordan are serving with him. They will operate a Family Desk in the lobby every Sunday morning and evening in April. Please give them the report IN WRITING detailing how your Lenten Group will phase into a Family or Families. Include in your report, when and where the new Family group(s) will be meeting and who the initial Leader will be. We will need the name, address and telephone number of the Leader so that we can invite him/her to the initial Leader's Council. Also, we need to know which of the new Families have space to consider adding new brothers and sisters-----ten being the recommended maximum size for a Family.
3. The issue of "New Life" which comes out on Easter has a special page on the inside of the back cover called the Family Page. Look for it and tell your members about it. Since the article was written three weeks ago, some of the details have changed but in general the article is an accurate presentation of the Family concept.
4. Enclosed is a sheet that can be used for Lenten Group type of discussions in April. It is purely to be thought of as a resource. Use as much or little of it as you wish.

Each month we will have a Family page in "New Life". I will appreciate having contributions for that page. In addition to having material similar to that on the enclosed sheet we want suggestions about fun places to go or fun things for a Family to do, upcoming major attractions on TV, a report of any outstanding experience that your Family had which would be helpful to other Families to know about (and give your Family a chance to "crow"), meaningful prayer experiences, etc. We want the Family Page to be one of the most helpful pages in each issue. We need your help for this.

Anyone who attended the Service of Witness and Celebration last Sunday night knows how meaningful the Lenten Groups were. Thank you for your part in making this so,

Lovingly,



***** WHAT IS THE FAMILY ? *****

Because of the great success of the Lenten Living Room Groups, the demand arose for some way to continue the small and intimate groups of caring brothers and sisters. The name selected for these long-term groups is *FAMILY*.

FAMILIES will:

1. Be small enough to meet in the living quarters of any of their members. Usually ten members is maximum.
2. Meet at least twice monthly - more often if desired.
3. Have a variety of activities, including fun - prayer - discussion - service - TV viewing - trips - etc. (There will be a *FAMILY PAGE* each month in "New Life" which will provide helpful material. A *FAMILY* may use as much, or as little, of this material as they wish. Where there is an expressed desire *FAMILIES* will be formed for groups with special needs.)
4. Rotate leadership so that all share in this important responsibility. At intervals a Co-Leader will be selected who will move up to the Leader's position. Each month there will be a Leader's Briefing Session at which all *FAMILIES* are to be represented.
5. Continue with the practice of upholding each other in daily prayer.
6. Recognize that each intimate *FAMILY* is an organic part of the larger *CHURCH FAMILY*. Each *FAMILY* group will undertake some type of project which will benefit the church or the denomination (such as the Prison Ministry).
7. Create an environment in which all of the brothers and sisters feel free to honestly and openly share their joys and their sorrows.

A more detailed explanation of the *FAMILY IDEA* can be found in the April issue of "New Life", on the *FAMILY PAGE* (on the inside of the back cover).

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(OVER)

***** HOW TO JOIN A FAMILY *****

If you were a member of a Lenten Group this has probably been discussed. If it has not, please contact your Lenten Leader.

If you were not a member of a Lenten Group, sign the form at the bottom of this sheet and turn it in to the **FAMILY DESK** in the lobby. At the latest we hope to have everyone in a **FAMILY** by **FAMILY NIGHT** --- April 27th.

FAMILIES are open to any person -- member or non-member -- who feels comfortable with the principles stated in the **FAMILY COVENANT**.

~~~~~
THE FAMILY COVENANT
~~~~~

Accepting the truth of the Scriptural statement,
"God places the solitary in Families" Psalm 68:6,
I commit myself to:

1. Be a responsible member of my **FAMILY**, participating regularly and actively in our **FAMILY** life.
2. Pray daily, and specifically, for each member of my **FAMILY**.
3. Share with my **FAMILY** openly & honestly my joys & needs.
4. Give loving support to each brother and sister in my **FAMILY**.
5. Recognize that my intimate **FAMILY** is an organic part of the larger **CHURCH FAMILY** and seek the well-being of the entire larger **FAMILY**.

(detach, sign, and turn in at **FAMILY DESK** in lobby)

Name (please print) Telephone Number

Number & Street City Zip Code

Do you have any requests
that would guide the **FAMILY**
COMMITTEE in placing you in
your **FAMILY**?

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Here are some resources that could be used by the newly established Family groups in our church. Use as many of them as you wish. A suggested approach would be to read aloud the Scripture passage. Spend five minutes in quiet reflection on its meaning. Then answer the questions suggested or other questions that seem appropriate. Select a leader but have everyone participate. Listen carefully to each other and find out what kind of help each person wants. These are adapted from the March issue of "Faith At Work".

Topic: TEMPTATION Read I Corinthians 10:1-13

The passage in Corinthians begins with warnings and ends with encouragement, which is typical of the Gospel. The Israelites who were blessed by God failed Him, and so may we. We must not take our "standing" for granted.

The sources of temptation are identified as idols. Can you name a few of your idols? What do you need to be on guard against? What can distract you from your primary goal?

We are not offered a temptation-free path, but we are promised "the way of escape." Can you name an escape hatch for each idol you have identified? Can you clarify a temptation you are now facing and identify the way of escape? How can the group be helpful to you? Do you want to be held accountable in some way by your Family during the coming week?

Topic: INJUSTICE I Peter 2:18-25

There is no doubt that Christians are to work for justice in the world and to resist injustice. Much in the Bible supports this. But what about those times when one is victimized by unjust treatment and feels powerless? The passage in Peter was written to slaves. Does it counsel passive acquiescence? Can you think of passages that counsel resistance?

Jesus is given as an example. But his suffering was redemptive. Are you in a situation now where you are being treated unjustly? What does God seem to be saying to you in it? What could you and the other members of your Family do to offer comfort or practical help to brothers or sisters who are experiencing injustice?

Topic: CONFLICT II Corinthians 1:23--2:17

This passage is one of many that deals with a common fact of life. Conflict is inevitable in human relations given the "fallenness" of human nature and the difficulties of understanding each other. The statement in verses 15 and 16 implies that what we do is going to please some people and offend others. Paul's conflict with the Corinthian Christians is not altogether clear, but that is not too important. His response is what matters.

Paul did not want to control the Corinthians ("lord it over" them), but neither did he back away from the conflict. He faced it head-on, accepting his responsibility, asking them to face their's, and opening up communication.

Do you like conflict? How do you tend to deal with it? Describe to your Family a specific conflict you now face, or have faced recently. What help would you like from your Family? What is Christ saying to you in the conflict?

Topic: ANXIETY Philippians 1:12-30; 4:4-7

Paul's situation, described in the Scripture passage, includes several elements: delay, injustice, hostility, loss and conflict. Let's focus on the uncertainty it caused. Was Paul anxious? Must we suppose him to be a perfect person, or can we allow him to be afraid and disturbed? How did he work through his feelings to the triumph he exhibits in this passage?

Paul wrote Philippians 4:6 because Christians do get anxious. Is it better to deny the fact or to acknowledge it and find the resources to surmount it? What is the Christian way to face anxiety?

Paul says that his difficulties have turned out for good. It is not always possible to see the good purpose in the evil that befalls us, but you may be able to look back on something you have been through in which you can now see the good. Describe such an incident to your Family. Are you currently in a situation in which you can see no good? What help would you like from your Family?

From Lenten Groups To Families -

- The Shape Of The Future

How do you top this? or Where do we go from here? Such questions were asked by enthusiastic participants in the Lenten Groups. The deep experiences of caring and sharing found in the Lenten Groups resulted in a widespread demand for continuing the Lenten experience in some form or another.

Now, the answer has been determined, The Lenten Groups will be phased into a new form --- The Family Group.

Families will be groups of brothers and sisters meeting together over a long period of time. No family is to be larger than ten members. At that point, the Family divides in order to be able to include new brothers and sisters who will be waiting for their place in a Family. In this way, Families will be kept from getting in-grown. Some Families will be Spanish speaking.

Families must meet at least twice a month but, in most cases, will probably meet weekly. By keeping the group no larger than ten, the Family can meet in the quarters of any of its members.

Families will have a variety of activities:

1. The Family will have fun together. Such events as going to the movies or plays, picnicing, birthday parties, beach outings, hikes, etc. will be part of their function. Often they will share a meal together or get together for bull sessions, singing, or TV viewing.
2. Prayer will be an essential part of the Family experience. From the Lenten Groups, we have learned the importance of a prayer list. Daily, each member of the Family will covenant to uphold every other member in caring prayer.
3. The Family will care for its members. Such practical matters as housing, jobs, sickness, providing a warm shoulder or a listening ear, loneliness, etc. will be a concern of the entire Family. As the hymn puts it, "We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear."
4. The Family will have discussions like those held in the Lenten Groups. There will be Bible study and the reading of spiritually helpful material. Resource materials will be published monthly on this Family page in "New Life." The Family page is to appear in this same location each month to make it easy to find and use. Contributions to the Family page will be welcome.
5. Families will have a church-oriented project. Such projects can cover a wide range from painting or cleaning to writing materials or putting on programs for the wider church family. Service projects oriented to the entire denomination (such as the Prison Ministry) would also be acceptable.
6. Families will worship together. Every month there will be a Sunday evening service which will be called Family Night. Families will encourage their members to worship and will often sit together and share communion together.

Each Family --- like each Lenten Group --- will quickly take on its own individual personality. In general, each family will decide on its own activities and frequency of meeting. There will be certain broad guidelines worked out by the Council on Growth and there will be Training and Report Meeting for Leaders. There is a Family Covenant which each member signs upon entering a Family which makes clear the commitment which each Family member undertakes in becoming a responsible part of this Family.

Families will rotate leadership. There will be both a Leader and a Co-Leader in each group. After a stated period, the Co-Leader will serve as Leader and a new Co-Leader will be selected. At the Training Meetings for Leaders, reports on progress in the Families will be received and problems solved.

Families will be open to any who wish to be a member. Hopefully, nearly 100% of our members will be in such sustaining fellowships. As in the Lenten Groups, there will be a mixture of ages and sexes in Families to provide balance and breadth.

There will be a transition from Lenten Groups to Families. Some Lenten Groups were small enough and congenial enough to become Families. Other Lenten Groups are being divided because of size (one group had 16 members!), choice of nights, geographic location, etc. into several Families. Each Lenten Group has been dealt with on an individual basis in determining the best possible transition for its members from Lenten Groups to Families.

Families will not be limited to church members --- as was the case with the Lenten Groups. Any who accept the purposes and disciplines of the Family are welcome. It has been our experience in the Lenten Groups that many who participated came to feel so close to their new brothers and sisters that they wished to seek membership in our church. Families are open to all brothers and sisters who seek such a supporting and loving fellowship and who accept the Covenant binding them to their new Family.

April has been designated by our new Pastor as Family month. During April, an all-out effort is being made to enroll as many of our members as possible in Families. The climax of the month's effort will be the first Family Night evening service when the newly signed Family Covenants will be consecrated as they are laid on the altar. The new families will share communion together that night and will be officially recognized in a beautiful and meaningful service or worship.

A Family enrollment desk has been set up in the lobby of the church. You can enroll by going to the Family desk and asking for a Family covenant, ACT TODAY! Your Family is waiting for you.

PRAYER, SHARE AND CARE

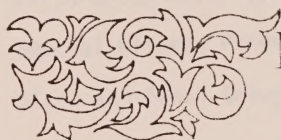
Somewhere in a living room in your neighborhood, during Lent, a dozen of your brothers and sisters will be meeting. You are invited to join them for a PRAYER, SHARE AND CARE experience. These groups will be meeting weekly for the six weeks of Lent—starting during the week in which February 12 occurs—in a living room near you.

Sponsored by MCC's Council on Christian Growth, up to fifteen Renewal Groups will provide our people with an opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship. The groups will consist of ten to twelve members each, and will keep the same membership for the six weeks of Lent. This will make possible the development of trust and caring.

In effect, each group will be like a family unit where each can come to know the other, receiving and giving Christian love, Bible study, rapping, and prayer will be the elements that will be shared in an informal living-room setting.

Groups are now being formed. You can sign up at tables in the entry before or after any church service. You may also sign up by contacting directly one of the thirty leaders listed below.

Each person signing up will remain with his or her selected group for the six sessions. Thirty carefully selected leaders have been in training



DAVID

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934-5730

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reservation suggested

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due to premature baldness**



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since New Year's to be ready. They will serve in leadership teams of two or three.

Those who will serve include: Mike Arbuckle, Bill Binkley, Jane Carl, Lucia Chappelle, Fred Conwell, Brenda Cromartie, Richard Davidson, Alan Ferrel, Flo Fleischman, Terry Foster, Virgil Hendershot, Eric Hultquist, Brenda Hunt, Bob Johnson, Maury Johnston, Steve Jordan, Mary Leiser, Larry Long, Sandy Loree, Jeff Matthews, Brian McCarthy, Randy Miller, June Norris, Daniel Padnos, Ben Rodermond, Larry Rodriguez, Earl Schmidt, Jim Wallace, Dick White, Terry Willis. Co-leaders of the series are Rev. Jim Glycer and Paulette Heron.

Many hours of planning and training have been spent on this program. It is estimated that more than 150 of our people will participate.

Renewal Groups will meet in many areas of the city and on various nights of the week. You select the location and night that best fit your needs. Each group will spend an hour and a half in small group Bible study, discussion, sharing of needs and problems, and prayer. Preceding or following, will be light refreshments and conversation. Each group will be encouraged to share a meal together at least once during the six weeks.

What will you get from participating? You could receive:

1. A sense of closeness with a small group of your brothers and sisters. Lifelong friendships could develop in such an atmosphere.
2. A better understanding of how the Bible applies to your life and how God can be more real to you.
3. The sense of giving support and love to others who come to trust you enough to share some of their hurts and their needs. Also, the sense of receiving such support and love for yourself.
4. The satisfaction of knowing that you have grown spiritually by accepting the challenge to attend all sessions of the group.

If this idea appeals to you, sign up right away. Lent starts on February 12. You will be forever glad that you did!

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POOL - GAMES
COCKTAILS

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Mon. - Fri. 2 p.m. - 2 a.m.

PHONE:

654-2391

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

LENTEN LIVING ROOM GROUPS

Request letter for Leader Recommendations		January 17
Selection of leaders / Pastor		January 22
Ministerial Staff Briefing		January 24
First Group leader training	Publicity Begins	January 28
Begin enlisting groups	PUBLICITY	February 21
Final Group leader training		March 3
First Group function (Ash Wednesday Service)		February 28
First Group meetings	week before	March 10
Second Group meetings	week before	March 17
Third Group meetings	week before	March 24
Fourth Group meetings	week before	March 31
Fifth Group meetings	week before	April 7
Special Witness Program	Palm Sunday evening Service	April 8
Sixth and Final Group meetings	week before	April 13 (Good Friday)

Dallas, Texas
January 17, 1978

Dear Friend,

We are planning to present a series of Lenten programs, here in Dallas. The Lenten program consists of a series of six Living Room Group meetings, led by two co-leaders trained by the MCC-Dallas staff. The Living Room Groups are comprised of eight to ten persons who meet weekly, as scheduled, and commit themselves to establishing a loving and caring group for the Lenten Season. The training periods for leaders will be conducted from January 28 through March 4. The first Lenten function will be the family sharing Feb 28th when the groups will sit together at Ash Wednesday service. The groups will last meet the week before Easter, April 15th.

These Lenten Living Room Groups will provide an opportunity for intimacy where mutual trust and loving Christian environment are developed. Persons of widely varying theological position are comfortable sharing together in the same loving and caring groups. The emphasis of this Lenten series is on "Relational Theology." Those who participate are led to relate on a level of honesty and trust to (a) their inner selves, (b) others in the group, and (c) God. Historically, this program has proved to be a very exciting and meaningful Christian experience.

I need your help to recruit twenty-five persons who are willing to commit themselves to the following:

- (1) Attend three training sessions on January 28, February 11 and 25, or on February 4, 18 and March 4;
- (2) Agree to work with a co-leader to organize and present the six group meetings;
- (3) To prayerfully and conscientiously enlist and follow-up on the members of your prayer group, after training, and
- (4) Commit to make this experience a top priority for themselves, their group and this Church for the period from now through Easter.

Group leaders should be -

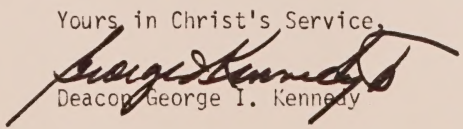
- (1)- a sensitive, loving enabler who helps each group member share to the maximum. By their own honest sharing and "gut" level participation, they set the tone and an example for others in the group to follow and share.
- (2)- able to make this experience a top priority from now through Easter.
- (3)- prepared for a remarkable growth opportunity and exhilarating period of service for the Lord.

Group leaders are not -

- (1)- a person with all the answers (Biblical, or otherwise),
- (2)- the group psychiatrist, or
- (3)- the group entertainer.

I would appreciate your recommendations right away for persons that I might contact to serve as leaders. Don't overlook yourself! Please give them to me in writing as soon as possible, so that Reverend Eastman and I might make our selection soon. Thank you most sincerely...

Yours in Christ's Service,


Deacon George I. Kennedy

January 26, 1979

Dear

Thank you for responding to our invitation.

I am very excited about the possibilities for the upcoming Lenten Groups. This could be one of the most meaningful experiences in 1979, or even our lives.

I will not try to outline the general plans for the Lenten series in this letter, since that will be covered in the first training session on Sunday afternoon at 4:00 pm (until 5:30).

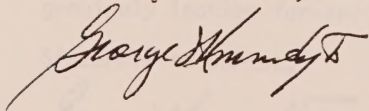
It is essential that you be present for the meeting on Sunday, that you and all the attendees be on time, and that you are there for all three of the training sessions. Because of the limited time, we will not plan for any makeup sessions. Please bring a notepad and pencil so that you can take permanent notes.

The key to a successful Lenten program is leadership. You are a part of that key. Only those who are fully committed and trained will be ready for a successful leadership. Therefore, only those who are disciplined enough to be trained can share in the leadership.

The commitment that we ask is that you take the leadership training, commit to cooperate with another leader to conduct the six weekly programs of the Lenten season, and let the Lord do the rest.

Your training starts at 4:00 pm Sunday in the Fellowship Hall of the Church. Jerry and I are counting on your being there. It promises to a great sharing of experience with others who have responded to this call.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "George H. H. H.", written in a cursive style.

January 26, 1979

Dear

Your name has been recommended to us to participate as a leader in the Lenten Family groups. You have been selected based upon your nomination as a result of the attached letter.

Jerry and I are excited about the possibilities for the upcoming Lenten Groups. We are joined in our excitement by the Pastor; we all feel this could be one of the most meaningful experiences in the life of our Church, and just as important in the lives of each of our leaders and the members of the Family Groups.

I will not try to outline the general plans for the Lenten series in this letter, since that will be covered in the first training session on Sunday afternoon at 4:00 pm (until 5:30).

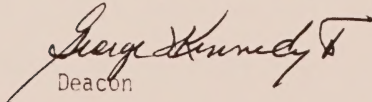
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The key to a successful Lenten program is leadership. You are a part of that key. Only those who are fully committed and trained will be ready for a successful leadership. Therefore, only those who are disciplined enough to be trained can share in the leadership.

We ask you to commit to take the leadership training, commit to cooperate with another leader to conduct the six weekly programs of the Lenten period, and commit to let the Lord take over and do the rest.

Your training starts at 4:00 pm Sunday in the Fellowship Hall at MCC Dallas, 2701 Reagan. We are all counting on your being there. It will be a pleasure to share this experience with you; I am genuinely looking forward to it.

Sincerely in Christ,


Deacon

February 10, 1979

TO: Leaders of the 1979 Lenten Family Groups

FROM: George and Jerry

We are nearly at the end of the training period for you Lenten Group Leaders. Soon you will begin to serve in the leadership capacity for which you have been trained. Please give the following points your attention:

1. Select your co-leader and pick your meeting time and day. Then let Jerry or I know the selection as soon as possible. When you can give us where you will meet, do so. We want to drop by during a meeting.
2. Begin to enroll the members of your group. Groups from six to ten (plus co-leaders) seem to be the best size.
3. If you can help us by working at the registration desk on February 21st, after service, or on Sunday February 25th Morning (before or after service) and/or evening (before or after service) let Jerry know. He will be in charge of the registration desk. We will share referrals from the desk to group leaders. By Ash Wednesday (Feb 28) we hope to have most groups reasonably full. By 10:30 a.m. Sunday March 4, please let Jerry know the count for your group. By 7:00 p.m. of that day be sure a copy of the registration form has been turned in to Jerry in the vestibule.
4. Plan to attend Ash Wednesday Service (Feb 28) and urge the members of your group to attend. This is actually the start of our Lenten program. There will be an introduction and special dedication of the Lenten Leaders at that service.
5. If you will need a Deacon or Exhorter to consecrate the elements for the final session, let me or the Church Office know when and where you will be meeting for that meal. Let us know before April 3d, please.
6. About mid-way, I plan to have a quick meeting of at least one of the leaders from each group. We will be talking about speakers for the special Palm Sunday evening service. We also would like your ideas about what should happen to the groups after Easter. That will probably be called for Sunday afternoon March 25th, 4:00 to 5:30 p.m.
7. Thank you for your cooperation thus far. I know that you are about to have one of the greatest Christian experiences of your life.

Praise God for the Blessing of your Service...

in Love,

George and Jerry

March 10, 1979

MEMO TO: Leaders of the 1979 Lenten Family Groups

FROM: George and Jerry

1. Well, here we are half way through this Lenten season and already the abundance of God's Blessing is apparent. The bubbling enthusiasm of not only the group leaders but the members, too, is spirited testimony of God's Touch. Jerry and I have learned from this experience and accept responsibility for the few failures experienced. Some how we may not have kept close enough track of enrolling in a couple of groups. But, I pray that you will let the success of this program be the overriding consideration. Last week we estimate that over one hundred persons were in the nine groups. I expect to lose one small group - hopefully moving the few members to other groups for the balance of the Lenten program. Praise God for the successes, already.

2. We want to remind you that we will be holding a leader's session on March 25th (next Sunday) from 4:00 to 5:30 to talk about possible speakers from each group for Palm Sunday Evening Witness, and about the possibility of continuing family groups after Lent. In this regard you might consider the following suggestions:

Name: Holy Families or Covenant Families

Meet: Twice monthly (at least) on a regular schedule. (May meet more, if group wants to for pot luck meal or social)

Program: Developed by Holy Family (or Covenant Family) Council headed by a designated Deacon and consisting of designated group leaders. I already have several possible program guides. The format would be similar to the Lenten one page guide and discussion. Programs would be distributed at a quarterly or monthly leader's meeting.

Current family groups would be encouraged to join in a covenant based upon Psalm 62:6, "God places the solitary in families." We have a guide for the covenant and will try to give you an example Sunday, if you are interested.

These families could provide a means for every member of our Church to be a member of a group. In this way there would be several persons who are specifically interested in each person's Christian growth and Church participation. These groups could well provide the missing link in our personal contact with newcomers and "old timers" who drift away.

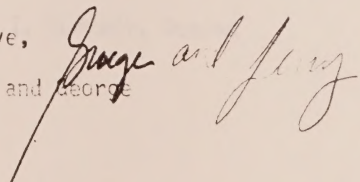
3. Thank you and God bless the groups who have contributed to the cost of this program. Your help is appreciated. An accounting will be included in the final report.

4. I know you don't want to be burdened by administrative details, and rightly so, but... it would help us in our reports if you will bring a copy of your membership list Sunday, and your attendance at the first three sessions. I want to be able to be able to tell Pastor Don and the Fellowship how God is Blessing our Church.

See you Sunday afternoon....

in Love,

Jerry and George



April 26, 1979

Dear Lenten Leader,

There are not words to express my thanks for your persistence and your faith demonstrated in your excellent leadership of the Lenten Family group. I know that you gained even more than you gave.

The success of the program is measured more in the lives of each participant, but some measure is in the Church commitment of continuing the program. Our first meeting will be Wednesday May 2, at the regular Wednesday service. After the Pot Luck Supper, and on the first Wednesday of each month from now on, we will gather in the Sanctuary for Invocation and Announcements. We will then separate into Fellowship Families, going into different parts of the building. At 8:15 we will reassemble in the sanctuary for communion and dismissal.

Then at one time during the remainder of the month, your Fellowship Family should meet to conduct a regular prayer, share, care program. I am enclosing a list of the discussion topics for the next two months for your use. If you can not serve as leader or have recommendations for other leaders, please let me know. We will probably hold a leader's session in mid-June to present up-coming programs.

For this first meeting of the Fellowship Family, we will ask you (1) to set the meeting time and place for the other May meeting, (2) discuss the Fellowship Family Covenant (copies will be distributed for each person) and (3) to use one or two minutes to get to know new people in the group. Please get a list of everyone who attends and who wants to participate so you can contact them before the next meeting. I hope you will be able to get a prayer list assembled, in the time allotted. If not, pick a common prayer point and focus the entire family upon that prayer point until your next meeting. Be sure to encourage specific personal and observable prayer requests. God wants us in a relationship that we can see, feel, and know.

Please let me have a list of your members, your meeting nite and place by Sunday evening May 6th (handwritten copy is fine).

Thanks to the several groups which took up a collection, we paid for the printing of the leader's packets and the Church paid for the printing of the bulliten inserts. The refreshments for the Lenten Leader first session were on Jerry and I, so we did pretty well. I expect that the Church will provide the Family Covenants, though I did hope that this program would be completely self-sustaining. For the record, three groups contributed \$6.66, \$4.18 and \$8.58 for a total of \$19.42. The bill for printing the packets was \$19.82. How's that for almost matching?

Again, thank you immeasurably for your help in making this program reach deep into the spiritual lives of your sisters and brothers. May Christ's Blessing for you continue and multiply, whatever you are called to do in His Service.

Your loving servant in Christ

George I. Kennedy, Deacon

SOMETHING SPECIAL

Somewhere in a living room in your neighborhood, during Lent, a dozen or so of your sisters and brothers will be meeting. You are invited to join them for a PRAYER, SHARE, and CARE experience. These groups will be meeting weekly for the six weeks of Lent--starting during the week in which March 7 occurs-- in a living room near you.

Sponsored by MCC-Dallas, about twelve Lenten Family Groups will provide our people with an opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship. The groups will consist of eight to twelve members each, and will keep the same membership for the six weeks of Lent. This will make possible the development of trust and caring.

In effect, each group will be like a family unit where each can come to know the other, receiving and giving Christian love. Bible study, rapping, and prayer will be the elements that will be shared in an informal living room setting.

Groups are now being formed. You can sign up at the table in the vestibule before and after any church service. You may also sign up by contacting directly one of the trained leaders, who will be introduced at different church services.

Each person signing up will remain with his or her selected group for the six sessions. All of the group leaders have been carefully selected and trained to be ready for the upcoming meetings. They will serve in leadership teams of two or three.

over

Many hours of planning and training have been spent on this program. It is estimated that about 120 of our people will participate.

Lenten Family Groups will meet in many areas of the City - and Metroplex - and on various nights of the week. You select the location and time that best fits your needs. Each group will spend about an hour and a half in small group Bible study, discussion, sharing of needs and problems, and prayer. Preceding or following, will be light refreshments and conversation. Each group will be encouraged to share a meal together at least once during the six weeks.

What will you get from participating? You could receive:

1. A sense of closeness with a small group of your sisters and brothers. Lifelong friendships can develop in this way.
2. A better understanding of how the Bible applies to your life and how God can be more real to you.
3. The sense of giving support and love to others who come to trust you enough to share some of their hurts and their needs. Also, the sense of receiving such support and love for yourself.
4. The satisfaction of knowing that you have grown spiritually by accepting the challenge to attend all sessions of the group.

If this idea appeals to you, sign up right away. Lent starts on February 28th, Ash Wednesday. You will be forever glad that you did.

GOD WILL BLESS YOU, ABUNDANTLY.

FELLOWSHIP FAMILY RESOURCES

Second Meeting in May TOPIC: TEMPTATION Read: I Corinthians 10:1-13

The passage in Corinthians begins with warnings and ends with encouragement, which is typical of the Gospel. The Israelites who were blessed by God failed Him, and so may we. We must not take our "standing" for granted.

The sources of temptation are identified as idols. Can you name a few of your idols? What do you need to be on guard against? What can distract you from your primary goal?

We are not offered a temptation-free path, but we are promised "the way of escape." Can you name an escape hatch for each idol you have identified? Can you clarify a temptation you are now facing and identify the way of escape? How can your Fellowship Family group be helpful to you? Do you want to be held accountable in some way by your family during the coming week, like until the next meeting?

Don't forget to report on your prayer results and to make a new list. Use the standard prayer closing for each meeting, and be sure to plan where you will be meeting well in advance.

First Meeting in June (June 6-Wednesday) TOPIC: INJUSTICE Read: I Peter 2:18-25

There is no doubt that Christians are to work for justice in the world and to resist injustice. Much in the Bible Supports this. But what about those times when one is victimized by unjust treatment and feels powerless? The passage in Peter was written to slaves. Does it counsel passive acquiescence? Can you think of any passages that counsel resistance?

Jesus is given as an example. But His suffering was redemptive. Are you in a situation now where you are being treated unjustly? What does God seem to be saying to you in it? What could you and the other members of your Fellowship Family do to offer comfort or practical help to sisters or brothers who are experiencing injustice?

Though time is limited at these Wednesday groups, don't forget to introduce the new members of the group and to invite them to participate in your family activity later in the month.

Second Meeting in June TOPIC: CONFLICT Read: II Corinthians 1:23--2:17

This passage is one of many that deals with a common fact of life. Conflict is inevitable in human relations given the "fallenness" of human nature and the difficulties of understanding each other. The statement in verses 15 and 16 implies that what we do is going to please some people and offend others. Paul's conflict with the Corinthian Christians is not altogether clear, but that is not too important. His response is what matters.

Paul did not want to control the Corinthians ("lord it over" them), but neither did he back away from the conflict. He faced it head-on, accepting his responsibility, asking them to face thei's, and opening up communication.

Do you like conflict? How do you tend to deal with it? Describe to your Fellowship Family a specific conflict you now face, or have faced recently. What help would you like from your Family? What is Christ saying to you in the conflict?

As we have found in our training and experience, leadership has a necessary part in our experience in the Lord. We follow, and in some cases, we lead. This next quarter will be spent in examining the subject of leadership. It is based upon a Bible Study Guide developed by Walden Howard and published in the May/June 1979 issue of *Faith at Work Magazine*.

Leadership is a broad subject with many aspects. The studies that we will use this quarter are limited to a few of those aspects, but it is our hope that they will stimulate the kind of searching that will enable you and your family member to see and maximize the opportunities that are yours to influence the lives of others toward truth and faith. *INSTRUCTORS NOTE: After the Bible passage(s) is read aloud take a few minutes to reflect on it (and perhaps to close your eyes and visualize it), then share around the group your answers to the questions. After the report on prayer accomplishments, urge your members to be supportive of each other in their conversational prayer about decisions made or difficult situations that are being faced within your family.*

JULY TOPICS - FAMILY NITE JULY 4

INHERENT LEADERSHIP *Mark 1:21-28*

Before you read the scripture have everyone shut their eyes and imagine themselves in Capernaum on the day they saw and heard Jesus for the first time. Try to set aside present feelings and discover what you would have felt in such a situation. What does Jesus look like? What is your first impression of him? When you have opened your eyes go around the group sharing whatever you wish to of the experience.

Now have someone read the scripture passage aloud. What was the first impression recorded of Jesus? What was it about Jesus that produced it? How do you suppose it differed from the scribes (teachers of the law)?

How did Jesus respond when his authority was challenged? (See *Matt 15:1,2; 21:23 Mark 2:7, 10; John 2:18* and elsewhere.)

Where do you feel you have authority? Does it originate inside or outside of you? Where would you like to live with a sense of inner authority? How can you allow the Spirit to make you more that way?

SECOND NITE DELEGATED LEADERSHIP *Matthew 9:35-10:33*

The disciples were given an order and the power to carry it out which was obviously beyond their human wisdom and strength. Put yourself in their place and imagine what you would have replied if your authority was challenged.

Did obedience to Jesus' command lead to success? Did it include danger and persecution? What reassurance did Jesus have? (See verses 19, 25, 28, 31.) The responsibility of leadership often brings loneliness, misunderstanding and danger. What are we to do with our fears?

What sense of calling have you (for your job, home, Christian witness, etc)? What difficulties have you encountered in that area? What resources does the scripture suggest that you have with which to overcome those difficulties? What step do you need to take this coming week? Share it with the group, ask for prayer and ask them to hold you accountable.

AUGUST TOPICS - FAMILY NITE AUGUST 1

GIFTED LEADERSHIP *I Timothy 4:6-16*

Paul's suggestions for Timothy highlight five words: training, example, gift, progress and watching. Each of us has at least one gift (strength) that can be useful in God's work. We are to *discipline* ourselves in it, not dwelling on our weaknesses (in Timothy's case his youth, which was not respected as it is in our society), *growing* so that others can see we are making progress,

and *paying attention* to ourselves in the process.

There is no automatic guarantee that our gifts will make us useful. They must be cultivated as diligently as a runner (or jogger) disciplines her/himself to work out every day, whether he feels like it or not.

Name one of your gifts. How can it be useful to God? How have you developed it? (Or, how do you intend to develop it?) What progress can others see? What process do you have to measure your growth?

Do you keep a journal? Imagine that you do; take a sheet of paper and write where you are at this point in your life in regard to one of your gifts -- its development, its visibility to others, and where you are growing (or are stuck). Share with the family what you wish.

SECOND NITE IN AUGUST SERVANT LEADERSHIP *John 13:1-17*

On the way up to Jerusalem for the last time together Jesus' disciples were disputing about who would have the chief places in his kingdom (*Matt. 27:17-28*), and even at the last supper the argument continued (*Luke 22:24-27*). In the midst of this Jesus took the servant's role and washed his disciples' feet. He "led from weakness," but John tells us (v 3) that he did it with full knowledge of the power God had given him.

True servant leadership is a delicate balance of strength and weakness. We are to our own gifts but not to insist on our rights (See *Phillipians 2:5-7*). It is a sign of true strength when you can "lay down your 'life'" and allow people to walk on you.

Reflect for a moment. Whom do you know that combines such strength and humility? Describe your experience of that person to the group. Go around the group a second time sharing the discoveries you have made through this experience and what you want to commit yourself to for the coming period, until next meeting.

SEPTEMBER TOPICS - FAMILY NITE SEPTEMBER 5

RESPECT FOR LEADERSHIP *Titus 3:1-14; Hebrews 13:7-9, 17.*

Here are practical admonitions to respect those who hold positions of authority. If you read the first two chapters of Titus you will see that Paul speaks first to the leaders, urging them to set a good example and live in submission to God. Our submission to our leaders has to be seen in the light of this and of our submission to God.

What are the principal causes of disputes over "authority" among us as Christians? Have you been involved in, or witnessed, a dispute recently in a church or Christian organization? How much revolved around perceptions of "the truth" and how much was power struggle, the need to exert control or to meet ego needs?

Does respecting our leaders mean we are to idolize them? How could we relate to their shortcomings? Their failures? To what degree can we allow them to be human and still follow them? What is their responsibility in all of this?

Reflect on a situation in which you have had (or do have) difficulty respecting your leader. What insight do these scripture passages give you for dealing with it? What changes could *you* make that would help both your leader and yourself? Share it with your group and ask for their counsel and prayer.

SECOND NITE DEALING WITH LEADERSHIP

WHO LED ME?

Frequently there are leaders in our lives to whom we never give that title. This meeting we will suggest a series of situations where persons have been helpful to you. As the situation is described, think of a real person in your own life experience who fits it. (You do not need to name the person unless you want to.)

List three characteristics of the person that were important to the situation. This can be done in a small group, or break the family into working groups of three or four.

Let one person read the situation and allow time for each person to respond with the characteristics of leadership before reading the next situation. Copies of the situations are in your packet to be used for this exercise.

- 1) Think of someone who led you in a significant step in faith.
- 2) Think of someone who was helpful to you in time of stress or grief.
- 3) Think of someone who has helped you to grow in some significant way.
- 4) Think of someone who helped you think through an important decision.
- 5) Think of someone who has challenged your ideas or taught you something exciting.

LOOKING FOR HELPERS

Acts 6:1-7 (the account of the selection of helpers in the early church) is a story about gifts and leadership. Imagine yourself being on the selection committee in the church at Jerusalem. What would you look for in your choice of a deacon or helper? Keeping in mind the task that was to be done, what would you want from these persons? On a piece of paper or chalk board, list these out and, as a group, decide on the five most important leadership characteristics for this particular need. You may want to close by reading aloud the story of Stephen (or sections of it) in Acts chapters six and seven.

WHO IS BEST WHERE:

The situation can change the style of leadership which is most effective for a group. Listed below are some situations. Of the following leaders in the early church, which person would you want as your leader in each situation Peter, John, Paul Andrew, Lydia or Priscilla (or any other you can think of)? Why would you choose her or him? (What gifts do they have?)

Let each person complete the step with the biblical characters individually. copies of this chart are included. Then share your answers -- especially the whys.

Now you may want to take the second step. If you were doing the same tasks and were going to use the people in your family, who would you choose for these tasks and why?

Again, have everyone fill in the names of people in your family and tell why they would choose them. Discuss your choices and reasons in the family.

WHO LED ME?

SITUATIONS

- 1-THINK OF SOMEONE WHO LED YOU IN A SIGNIFICANT STEP IN FAITH.
- 2-THINK OF SOMEONE WHO WAS HELPFUL TO YOU IN TIME OF STRESS OR GRIEF.
- 3-THINK OF SOMEONE WHO HAS HELPED YOU TO GROW IN SOME SIGNIFICANT WAY.
- 4-THINK OF SOMEONE WHO HELPED YOU THINK THROUGH AN IMPORTANT DECISION.
- 5-THINK OF SOMEONE WHO HAS CHALLENGED YOUR IDEAS OR TAUGHT YOU SOMETHING EXCITING.

WHO IS BEST WHERE?

SITUATION	LEADER	WHY
(1) Your group will have a debate with another group about discipleship.		
(2) Your group is going to have a month-long study of the book of Genesis.		
(3) Your group has been asked to help the Christian education committee design a new Sunday school building for multi-use space.		
(4) You want to increase the size of your group and perhaps start some more groups like it.		
(5) Your group is trying to support a new missionary and you want people beyond the group to help too.		

***** HOW TO JOIN A FAMILY *****

If you have been a member of a Lenten Family Group, this has probably been discussed. If it has not, please contact your Lenten Leader.

If you were not a member of a Lenten Group, we will begin Fellowship Family meetings on Wednesday evening May 2, at the regular worship service at 7:30 pm. If you will not be able to attend the Wednesday Service, and you wish to join a group, please sign at the bottom of this sheet and place it in the collection plate or turn it in to the Church Office. A leader will contact you to inform you of the meeting time and place.

FELLOWSHIP FAMILIES are open to any person -- *member or non-member of MCC* -- who feels comfortable with the principles presented in the Fellowship Family Covenant.

THE FELLOWSHIP FAMILY COVENANT

Accepting the truth of the Scriptural statement, *"God places the solitary in families"* Psalm 68:6, I commit myself to:

1. Be a responsible member of My FELLOWSHIP FAMILY, participating regularly and actively.
2. Pray daily, and specifically, for each member of My FELLOWSHIP FAMILY.
3. Share with my FELLOWSHIP FAMILY openly & honestly my joys and needs.
4. Give loving support to each sister and brother in My FELLOWSHIP FAMILY.
5. Recognize that my FELLOWSHIP FAMILY is an organic part of the larger CHURCH FAMILY and seek the well-being of the entire larger family.

-- (to join a Family, detach, sign and turn this in) --

NAME (print) _____

Phone Nr: () _____ City _____

ADDRESS: _____ ZIP _____

Preferred meeting nite, if any. _____

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***** WHAT IS THE FELLOWSHIP FAMILY? *****

Because of the great success of the Lenten Family Groups, the desire has grown for some way to continue the small and intimate groups of caring family members. The name selected for these long-term groups is Fellowship Family.

FELLOWSHIP FAMILY:

1. Be small enough to meet in the facility provided for their group. Most will be under 12 persons.
2. Meet at least two times each month - more often for social occasions, if desired.
3. Have a variety of activities, including fun - prayer - discussion - service - TV viewing - trips - etc. (Family groups will center around the guided program established by the Fellowship Family Leaders)
4. Rotate leadership so that others may share in this all important responsibility. At intervals a Co-Leader will be selected who will move up to the Leader's position. At least quarterly there will be a Leader's Session at which all Families are to be represented.
5. Continue with the practice of upholding each other in daily prayer.
6. Recognize that each intimate FELLOWSHIP FAMILY is an organic part of the larger CHURCH FAMILY. Each Family group should take some type of project which will benefit the Church Family.
7. Create an environment in which all of the members of the family (all sisters and brothers) feel free to honestly and openly share their joys and needs.

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Wednesday May 2, 1979 FAMILY FELLOWSHIP NITE

6:30 pm Church Family POT LUCK SUPPER

Evening Worship Service 7:30 pm

Prelude
Opening Hymn

Musicians

Invocation
Announcements

Deacon Kennedy

FELLOWSHIP FAMILIES MEET

Monday Groups

Ernie & Deb.....Deacon's office

Phil & Richard.....Choir Lovt

Tuesday Groups

Dave & Steve.....Choir Room

Dave & Bill.....Fellowship Hall South

Thursday Group

Jamie & Liz.....Chapel

Friday Groups

Frank & Patrick.....Fellowship Hall North

Pat & Becky.....Vestibule Room

Saturday Group

Jim & Terry.....Sanctuary rear

At 8:10 there will be a warning bell

At 8:15 Congregational Hymn

Confession
Absolution and Reconciliation

Holy Communion

Closing Hymn

Benediction

Deacon Kennedy

Your opportunity to make the most of this program
will be to make the commitment indicated in the
Covenant of the Fellowship Family given to you
this evening.

Wednesday, June 6, 1979 FAMILY FELLOWSHIP NITE

6:15 pm Church Family POT LUCK SUPPER

7:15 pm Evening Worship Service Singspiration

Prelude

Musicians

Opening Hymn

Invocation

Deacon Kennedy

Welcome and Announcements

MEETING OF THE FELLOWSHIP FAMILIES

Monday Groups

Ernie & Deb.....Beulahland

Phil & Richard.....Choir Loft

Tuesday Groups

Dave & Steve....Associate Pastor's Study

Dave & Bill.....Fellowship Hall South

Thursday Group

Jamie & Margaret.....Small Chapel

Friday Groups -

Frank & Patrick....Fellowship Hall North

Pat & Becky.....Exhorter/Deacon's Office

Saturday Group

Jim & Terry.....Sanctuary Rear

At 8:30 pm there will be a warning bell

At 8:45 pm Dismissal from Groups

There will be no reassembly tonight.

Wednesday, JULY 4, 1979 FAMILY FELLOWSHIP NITE

3:00 pm Church Family FOURTH OF JULY PICNIC

7:15 pm Evening Worship Service Singspiration

Prelude Musicians

Opening Hymn

Invocation Deacon Kennedy

Welcome and Announcements

Offeratory

MEETING OF THE FELLOWSHIP FAMILIES

Monday Groups

Ernie & Deb.....Beulahland

Phil & Richard.....Choir Loft

Tuesday Groups

Dave & Steve....Associate Pastor's Study

Dave & Bill.....Fellowship Hall South

Thursday Group

Jamie & Margaret.....Small Chapel

Friday Groups -

Frank & Patrick....Fellowship Hall North

Pat & Becky.....Exhorter/Deacon's Office

Saturday Group

Jim & Terry.....Sanctuary Rear

At 8:40 pm there will be a warning bell

At 8:45 pm Dismissal from Groups

There will be no reassembly tonight.

Wednesday, August 1, 1979 FAMILY FELLOWSHIP NITE

7:30 pm Evening Worship Service

Singspiration

Prelude

Musicians

Opening Hymn

Invocation

Deacon George Kennedy

Welcome and Announcements

Offeratory Prayer and Collection

MEETING OF THE FELLOWSHIP FAMILIES - LEADERSHIP

Ernie & Deb Beulahland

Phil & Richard Deacon & Exhorter Rm

Dave & Steve Associate Pastor's Office

Dave & Bill Fellowship Hall South

Jamie & Margaret Small Chapel

Frank & Patrick Fellowship Hall North

Pat & Becky To Be Announced

Jim & Terry Sanctuary Rear

At 8:40 pm there will be a warning bell

Dismissal at 8:45 pm from the Groups

There will be no reassembly

Choir Practice follows in the Sanctuary

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

A Study/Dialogue Series for Lent is offered by the UFMCC Commission on Faith, Fellowship, and Order (CFFFO).

ABOUT

As Lent begins in the UFMCC is a young church. It has been only recently that some of us have begun to experience death and grief in a personal way. This study/dialogue series is designed to help people get in touch with their experiences and feelings. The hope is that each person participating will be empowered to face the resurrection possibilities in all of life's situations. Faith and courage for all as they begin this journey.

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

CLAIMING NEW LIFE IN THE EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF, LOSS, AND DEATH

Following the Lenten season of fasting and prayer, it is designed to help people find a new life in the resurrection. Of course, it may be read any time of year. The purpose of the series is to help people find a new life in the resurrection. The purpose of the series is to help people find a new life in the resurrection.

A STUDY/DIALOGUE SERIES FOR LENT OR OTHER TIMES

developed by the Rev. Bob Hogg
UFMCC Commission on Faith, Fellowship, and Order
1987

SCHEDULE (if used for Lent 1987)

Begin by introducing the series in February. Sign up groups to begin and hold the resurrection studies in February. Sign up participants by the first of March.

Session 1: Week of March 1st - 5th

Session 2: Week of March 12th - 18th

Session 3: Week of March 25th - 31st

Session 4: Week of April 1st - 7th

Session 5: Week of April 14th - 20th

Session 6: Week of April 27th - 3rd

Prayer Vigil after Easter with Group Directors

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

A Six-Session Dialogue Series for Lent or other times developed by the Faith, Fellowship, and Order Commission, UFMCC.

PURPOSE:

By many standards the UFMCC is a young church. It has been only recently that many of us have begun to experience death and dying on a personal level. This six-week series is designed to help people get in touch with their experiences and beliefs. The hope is that each person participating will be empowered to find the resurrection possibilities in all of life's situations. Peace and blessings to all as they begin this journey.

STRUCTURE:

The series is divided into six sessions of two hours each, followed by a half hour for socializing and refreshments. It is designed to fit within the format of other FFO Lenten Series. Of course, it may be used any time of year. Your congregation is encouraged to establish as many small groups of 6-10 people as possible to meet once a week on a weeknight for the six weeks during Lent. Some congregations may wish to use existing parish family structures; others organize several study groups in members' homes; others use existing midweek discussion/prayer times. The final session which includes a shared meal and eucharist falls during Holy Week. Two co-leaders should be chosen in advance to lead each group. These co-leaders should meet with the series coordinator at least two or three weeks in advance to review the materials and coordinate the sign up of participants. It is also extremely important to do an orientation session with the group leaders, for which a model is enclosed.

SCHEDULE (if used for Lent 1987):

Begin to advertise the series in January. Sign up group leaders and hold the orientation session in February. Sign up participants by the first of March.

Session 1 (week of March 9): DEATH

Session 2 (week of March 16): WE ARE LIVING: WE MAKE CHOICES

Session 3 (week of March 23): DYING IN LIFE: THE LOSSES WE LIVE

Session 4 (week of March 30): AFTER DEATH: LIFE

Session 5 (week of April 6): GOOD GRIEF

Session 6 (week of April 13): CELEBRATING DEATH

Wrap-up Evaluation after Easter with Group Co-leaders

GUIDELINES FOR LENTEN SERIES

CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRUST are essential. Nothing kills group spirit faster (and creates negativity for future years) than for someone to discover that something private they have trusted to the group has been spread around! It is imperative that you convey to your group the absolute necessity of keeping confidential what they hear in the group. They are not even to share it with their spouses.

MODELING by the group leaders is necessary. Answer each question first yourself to demonstrate appropriate length and depth of response. If the leader is "real", the group will tend to be "real". The leader models openness, honesty, and acceptance, and sets a tone for the group.

PLANNING AHEAD is necessary. Make sure to have enough copies of the weekly Take-Home sheet for everyone. Have name tags already made out for the first week. Bring enough large index cards for everyone for Session Six and also the elements for a simple eucharist.

PROMPTNESS is essential. Begin and end on time, with one and a half hours for the session (no more than two hours), and a half hour for socializing and refreshments. Most people need to get up the next morning for work and need to get home. If your sessions go on and on for hours, you will lose some people. Better to leave them wanting more than to keep them too long.

REFRESHMENTS are important, at least a beverage (preferably not caffeinated). "Munchies" are nice too after a two-hour session. Low sugar and low salt snacks are a good idea for the health-conscious. Give people a choice. The group leaders could provide the refreshments the first week, and then get volunteers for the remaining weeks.

SMOKING may well be an issue. Do your best to accomodate both the smokers and the non-smokers. This may mean a mid-way break.

FOLLOW-UP is essential. Before the first meeting of your group, contact by phone each of the persons who have signed up to remind them. Build up their expectations. Make sure they understand how to reach the location of your meeting and the time. Stress that you will start on time.

The people in the group should call one of the co-leaders if they are going to be late or are unable to make that week's session. If any persons miss any of the meetings, include a need of theirs on the prayer list. Call this person the next day, tell them you missed their presence (don't guilt-trip), give a brief summary of the session, and tell them what the prayer list is. In this way, the absent person feels included.

CONTINUITY is important. One of the by-products of this series may be outreach, and church members should be encouraged to invite people to participate who might not go to a worship service. This outreach should be done before the series begins, however. For anyone to get maximum benefit from the series, they need to be present for all six sessions because the sessions build on each other. Also you don't want to have to start from scratch building group trust each time with new people.

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

ORIENTATION SESSION

Meet with all group co-leaders at least once (more if possible) before the series begins.

INTRODUCTION (45 minutes)

The series coordinator opens with prayer. Beginning with the coordinator and moving in a circle around the group, each person is invited to answer the first of the four questions from Session One. After the first question has been answered by all, continue in turn with each of the other three questions.

Next, do the second exercise from Session One. (15 minutes)

GUIDED MEDITATION (20 minutes)

The series coordinator should lead the co-leaders through the meditation found in Session Five. When finished, have them respond to the questions. Answer any questions the co-leaders may have in regard to how to lead the meditation effectively.

OVERVIEW OF WHOLE SERIES (10 minutes)

Pass out a complete copy of the whole series to each co-leader. Do a quick overview of the purpose of the series, the content of all six sessions, and the guidelines for the series. Respond to any questions the co-leaders may have.

Explain that co-leaders, depending on interest and ability, should take turns leading the sessions, including the opening prayer, discussion of prayer requests from the previous week, the subject and questions for the session, and the closing prayer circle. One or both should be responsible for follow-up calls to any absent members, arranging for refreshments, etc.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE (30 minutes)

Have each co-leader share with the whole group one prayer request for which they would like to be remembered by the other co-leaders during the six weeks of the series. Encourage these group leaders to keep in touch with each other and with the series coordinator while the series is going on to share how their groups are going and to give needed support. You may want to exchange telephone numbers to encourage such sharing.

Then invite the group to form a circle and ask each person to pray silently for themselves, then for the person on their right, then for the person on their left. Then invite each person to pray in turn (either aloud or silently), squeezing the hand to their left when finished.

Explain the use of the Take-Home Sheet, one of which will be passed out to each participant each week of the series. Before the Prayer Circle each week, each member of the group shares with the others one thing for which they would like to be remembered in prayer for the next week. Each person notes that person's name and prayer request on their Take-Home sheet. In this way each person takes home each week a list of prayer requests for all the others. The sharing of prayer requests each week will be followed by a prayer circle such as described above.

REFRESHMENTS (no more than 30 minutes):

Close with refreshments and socializing.

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

SESSION I

DEATH

INTRODUCTION (40 minutes):

Open with prayer and have each person introduce themselves to the group. Briefly explain the outline for the next six weeks. Then have each person answer the following questions:

- (1) Where did you live when you were about twelve years old?
- (2) What was your first personal experience with death and dying?
- (3) How was the subject of dying talked about in your family?
- (4) When did you first know there was life beyond death?

MOVING DEEPER INTO THE THEME (15 minutes):

For many people today, death is seen as unnatural. Science and medicine have advanced so that many believe that they are almost invincible. Death is hidden, an embarrassment, talked about in whispers. Many even have trouble saying the word "death". We use euphemisms like "She passed away" or "He went to meet his Maker" to mean dying and death.

On a large piece of newsprint paper or on a chalkboard, have someone write down the words and phrases meaning death and dying that people in the group have heard and used. Encourage people to say whatever comes into their minds: serious, clinical, or slang. Each person must contribute at least one. When you finish, discuss the words that may be new to anyone in the group. Discuss also the words that may make some uncomfortable.

Hand out the Take-Home Sheet for Week One. Explain how it is to be used (i.e. prayer list). Read the Scripture for the week, Romans 6:3-11.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE (30 minutes):

Follow the process described in the Orientation Session for reflecting on personal prayer requests, sharing them, and joining in a closing prayer circle. This same process will be repeated at the end of each session.

REFRESHMENTS AND SOCIALIZING (no more than 30 minutes)

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

WEEK ONE

TAKE-HOME SHEET

God be in my head
and in my understanding.
God be in my eyes
and in my looking.
God be in my mouth
and in my speaking.
God be in my heart
and in my thinking.
God be at my end
and in my departing.

(old Sarum Primer)

PRAYER LIST

READING FOR THE WEEK, Romans 6:3-11

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

SESSION II

WE ARE LIVING: WE MAKE CHOICES

OPENING (30 minutes):

Open with prayer and with each person reporting back on their prayer request of the previous week. This process will begin each of the remaining sessions.

MOVING DEEPER INTO THE THEME (1 hour):

Read Deuteronomy 30:19.

"Life is what you make it." "Each day is full of new possibilities." "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." Cliches? Yes, but each is true. How we participate in each day is a choice we make. Some choose not to participate fully in life because of the inevitability of death. But is the reality of our death reason enough not to seek an abundant life? We are called to choose life. For many the choices they make are not life-giving ones. Many of the choices we make do violence to our person. Hate, despair, oppression, and guilt all cause stress. Many react to stress in their lives by abusing drugs or alcohol. Others react by striking out at others; this is called "horizontal violence". The church is about enabling people to make life-giving choices. Resurrection possibilities are present. We just need to seek them out.

Ask the following questions to the group, and encourage as many as possible to share their response. Try to limit the discussion on each of the questions to 15 minutes.

- (1) How do you cope with stress in your everyday living? Do you cope or do you let stress get the best of you?
- (2) Do you believe you have the power to make choices in your life or do you feel that something else holds power over you? If so, what? Family? Guilt? The Church? Society? Government?
- (3) How much choice do you believe Jesus had in how he lived his life? Did he question his calling, his purpose? What does your faith say?

Read the Scripture for the week, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE (30 minutes):

REFRESHMENTS AND SOCIALIZING (no more than 30 minutes)

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

WEEK TWO

TAKE-HOME SHEET

After all, what is death?
Just nature's way of telling you to slow down.
(an American insurance proverb)

PRAYER LIST

READING FOR THE WEEK, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Pray for a well ordered life.

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

SESSION III

DYING IN LIFE: THE LOSSES WE LIVE

OPENING (30 minutes):

Open with prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

MOVING DEEPER INTO THE THEME (1 hour):

Read Exodus 14:11-12.

As we experience life, we experience many losses. These losses could be called little deaths. As we move from one stage of development to the next, as our relationships change, as our expectations change, we grieve for the loss of what was before. When Israel was delivered from bondage in Egypt, some believed that slavery was better than the unknown of the wilderness. In our lives many remain in situations that are oppressive because the safety of the known is better than than risking the unknown.

Ask the following questions to the group. Encourage everyone to share their response. Try to limit the discussion of each question to 15 minutes.

- (1) Share an experience in your life where you remained in a situation or relationship that was not good. What were your reasons for staying? What were your reasons for leaving?
- (2) Have you ever been an "Egypt" to an Israel's bondage? In other words, have your actions ever kept a person or group in economic, social, or emotional bondage?
- (3) Share a loss you are experiencing at this moment of your life. Is resurrection possible?

Read the Scripture for the week, John 11.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE (30 minutes):

REFRESHMENTS AND SOCIALIZING (no more than 30 minutes)

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

WEEK THREE

TAKE-HOME SHEET

Christ said not:

"Thou shalt not be tempested;
Thou shalt not be travailed;
Thou shalt not be afflicted."

But Christ said,

"Thou shalt not be overcome."

(Julian of Norwich)

PRAYER LIST

READING FOR THE WEEK, John 11

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

SESSION IV

AFTER DEATH: LIFE

OPENING (30 minutes):

Open with prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

MOVING DEEPER INTO THE THEME (1 hour):

Read Revelation 21:1-4.

We die, and then what? Is there reward? Is there punishment? Is there nothing? Much of what we believe about what happens when we die has to do with our image or sense of God. Is your God loving, forgiving? Is your God vengeful, judging?

Ask the following questions to the group. Encourage everyone to share their response. Try to limit the discussion on each of the questions to 15 minutes.

- (1) What do you believe happens after people die? Where does this belief come from?
- (2) Where does judgment fit in your perception of death? Do you feel that you live up to God's expectations for your life? Are you your own harshest judge?
- (3) The Resurrection means that we are a forgiven people. Can you apply that forgiving power to yourself? What does resurrection mean to you personally? Give an example of resurrection in your life.

Read the Scripture for the week, Psalm 130.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE (30 minutes):

REFRESHMENTS AND SOCIALIZING (no more than 30 minutes)

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

WEEK FOUR

TAKE-HOME SHEET

"Why, of course, God will forgive me.
that's God's business."

(Heinrich Heine, on his death bed)

PRAYER LIST

Ron
Wak 645-0317
before 2:30

READING FOR THE WEEK, Psalm 130

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

SESSION V

GOOD GRIEF

OPENING (30 minutes):

Open with prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

MOVING DEEPER INTO THE THEME (20 minutes):

Read Lamentations 3:19-33. We grieve for what is lost. We grieve for what will never be. We grieve for those who have died. We grieve for our own death. Many reject grief; they see it as a negative emotion. But why can't grief be positive? Why can't we experience it as a cleansing emotion? Grief is honest; it is how we feel. The task we face is to find the resurrection, the healing that is possible within our grief.

Ask the following question to the group, and encourage everyone to share their response. Try to limit the discussion to 15 minutes.

What have your experiences of grieving been like? Have there been any good experiences? Were they all bad? What did you learn about yourself during your grieving?

GUIDED MEDITATION (40 minutes):

One of the group leaders is to slowly guide the group through this exercise. The relaxation phase should take 3-5 minutes to complete. The meditation phase should take about ten minutes. If possible, provide relaxing music as a help for people to meditate. First, have everyone get comfortable somewhere in the room. Next have them close their eyes. Then begin...

"We are preparing ourselves for a journey. First we must release the tension present in our bodies. Take a deep, slow breath. Hold it for a moment. Now slowly let it out. As you do, feel your body begin to relax. With each breath, in...out, feel yourself become free from tension. In...out. In...out. Continue to do this a few more times.

"Keep your eyes closed. Imagine that you are surrounded by a vast darkness. Slowly appearing before you is someone whom you love who has died. Who is it? Imagine their face before yours. Greet them. Hug them if you like. Now tell them how you feel about their no longer being present in your life. Tell them something you never had the chance to while they were alive. Then imagine what they might say to you. Now say good-bye. You are once again alone, breathing slowly in... and out. When ready, open your eyes."

Have the group gather again. When they are all together, ask this question. Encourage all to share. Try to limit the discussion on this question to 30 minutes.

Share with the group what you just experienced. Why did you envision? What was said? Has this helped you in any way?

Read the Scripture for the week, Acts 9:36-43.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE (30 minutes):

REFRESHMENTS AND SOCIALIZING (no more than 30 minutes)

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

WEEK FIVE

TAKE-HOME SHEET

My love came back to me
under the November tree
shelterless and dim.
He put his hand upon my shoulder.
He did not think me strange or older;
Nor I, him.

(Frances Cornford)

PRAYER LIST

READING FOR THE WEEK, Acts 9:36-43

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

SESSION VI

CELEBRATING DEATH

OPENING (30 minutes):

Open with prayer and reporting back on prayer requests.

MOVING DEEPER INTO THE THEME (1 hour):

Read Mark 16:1-2

The women went to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. Their custom required it. They would express their love for their friend by anointing him with oil and spices. We have death customs too. Some of these customs help us remember those who have died.

Lead the following three exercises. Try to limit each of the three to 15 minutes.

- (1) How would you like to be remembered? On a piece of paper list what you like to be remembered for? What in your life makes you special? If you like, write your obituary. Share what you have with the group.
- (2) Have available for each person in the group a large blank card. Have them write their name at the top of the card, and underneath their name the words "I am raised to new life in Christ." Next, pass the cards around the group so that each person can write one "special thing" about every other person in the group on that person's card. Everyone will end up with a card of affirmations from the group.
- (3) The women found the stone had been rolled back; the Christ had been resurrected. Creation was new that morning. Encourage a general discussion on the following questions. Try to get everyone to share.

Have any "stones" been rolled back for you during this Lenten series? Are you a new creation? How has your perception of death changed? Of life?

CLOSING MEAL AND PRAYER CIRCLE (1 hour)

Share in a potluck meal together. End the meal by reading the Scripture for the week, Luke 23 & 24 (you may want to divide this up among several readers). And then share in a simple eucharist.

In the final prayer circle of this Lenten series, have each person share a long term request that they would like to be remembered for in prayer during the month ahead.

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

WEEK SIX

TAKE-HOME SHEET

"Bury me where the birds will sing over my grave."
(Alexander Wilson)

Indeed every living person
is no more
than a puff of wind,
a shadow!
What then can I hope for, God?
I put my hope in you.
(Psalm 39:5-7)

PRAYER LIST

READING FOR THE WEEK, Luke 23 & 24

RESURRECTION POSSIBILITIES

EVALUATION SESSION

A week or two after Easter (or after the series ends), call all the group co-leaders together for an evaluation session. Check in on their personal prayer requests made during the Orientation Session. Spend some time answering the questions:

- (1) What part of the series did you like best and why?
- (2) What part of the series did you like least and why?
- (3) What suggestions do you have for improvement?
- (4) What important personal learnings or growth can you share?

The series coordinator should record and compile these responses and mail them to: The Rev. Bob Hogg, 23401 Roanoke, Oak Park, MI 48237. A copy of each of the evaluation sent in will be forwarded to the Chair of FFO. The responses received will be used in refining the series and developing a one-day workshop on death and dying.

This series was developed for FFO by Bob Hogg, with input from Jennie Boyd Bull. Many thanks go to Jeffrey Pulling and others for their assistance and support.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Backer, Barbara A., *Death and Dying: Individuals and Institutions*, New York, NY, Wiley, 1982.

Berrigan, Daniel, *We Die Before We Live: Talking With the Very Ill*, New York, NY, Seabury Press, 1980.

Bugen, Lary, *Death and Dying: Theory/Research/Practice*, Dubuque, IA, Wm. C. Brown Co., 1979.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth, *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*, New York, NY, MacMillan Co., 1974.

On Death and Dying, 1969.

Living With Death and Dying, 1981.

Levine, Steven, *Who Dies?*

Maguire, Daniel, *Death By Choice*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday & Co., 1974.

Narrator: Then they began to dispute among themselves as to which of them would do such a deed.

A dispute arose among them about who would be regarded as the greatest. He said:

Jesus: "Earthly kings lord it over their people. Those who exercise authority over them are called their benefactors. Yet it cannot be that way with you. Let the greater among you be as the junior, the leader as the servant. Who, in fact, is the greater—he who reclines at table or he who serves the meal? Is it not the one who reclines at table? Yet I am in your midst as the one who serves you. You are the ones who have stood loyally by me in my temptations. I for my part assign to you the dominion my Father has assigned to me. In my kingdom, you will eat and drink at my table, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

"Simon, Simon! Remember that Satan has asked for you to sift you all like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may never fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers."

Narrator: Peter said to him,

Peter: "Lord, at your side I am prepared to face imprisonment and death itself."

Narrator: Jesus replied,

Jesus: "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow today until you have three times denied that you know me."

Narrator: He asked them,

Jesus: "When I sent you on mission without purse or traveling bag or sandals, were you in need of anything?"

Narrator: They replied,

People: "Not a thing."

[Narrator:] [He said to them:]

Jesus: "Now, however, the man who has a purse must carry it; the same with a traveling bag. And the man without a sword must sell his coat and buy one. It is written in Scripture, 'He was counted among the wicked,' and this, I tell you, must come to be fulfilled in me. All that has to do with me approaches its climax."

Narrator: They said,

Peter: "Lord, here are two swords!"

Narrator: He answered,

Jesus: "Enough."

Narrator: Then he went out and made his way, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; his disciples accompanied him. On reaching the place he said to them,

Jesus: "Pray that you may not be put to the test."

Narrator: The soldiers also made fun of him, coming forward to offer him their sour wine and saying,

Soldier: "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

Narrator: There was an inscription over his head:

"This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals hanging in crucifixion blasphemed him:

Thief I: "Aren't you the Messiah? Then save yourself and us."

Narrator: But the other one rebuked him:

Thief II: "Have you no fear of God, seeing you are under the same sentence? We deserve it, after all. We are only paying the price for what we've done, but this man has done nothing wrong."

Narrator: He then said,

Thief II: "Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign."

Narrator: And Jesus replied,

Jesus: "I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise."

Narrator: It was now around midday, and darkness came over the whole land until midafternoon with an eclipse of the sun. The curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two. Jesus uttered a loud cry and said,

Jesus: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Narrator: After he said this, he expired.

Narrator: The centurion upon seeing what had happened, gave glory to God by saying,

Soldier: "Surely this was an innocent man."

Narrator: When the crowd which had assembled for this spectacle saw what had happened, they went home beating their breasts. All his friends and the women who had accompanied him from Galilee were standing at a distance watching everything. *

There was a man named Joseph, an upright and holy member of the Sanhedrin, who had not been associated with their plan or their action. He was from Arimathea, a Jewish town, and he looked expectantly for the reign of God. This man approached Pilate with a request for Jesus' body. He took it down, wrapped it in fine linen, and laid it in a tomb hewn out of the rock, in which no one had yet been buried.

That was the Day of Preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed along behind. They saw the tomb and how his body was buried. Then they went home to prepare spices and perfumes. They observed the sabbath as a day of rest, in accordance with the law.

HYMN: The Servant King

Printed.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE-FOLLOWED BY THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Our God in heaven, holy is your name. Your dominion come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Do not bring us to the test, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the power and the reign and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

WORSHIP WITH OUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY: We Give Thee But Thine Own (Vs.1) 110
OFFERTORY PRAYER

COMMUNION HYMN: Jesus Paid It All Printed

L: God be with you. P: And also with you.
L: Lift up your hearts. P: We lift them up to God.
L: Let us give thanks. P: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

SANCTUS: Holy, holy, holy, God of power and grace: Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. Hosanna in the highest.

BREAKING OF BREAD-THE BLESSING OF THE CUP

THE MYSTERY OF OUR FAITH: Christ has died. Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

CLOSING HYMN: We're Marching to Zion 146

BENEDICTION: God go with you. P: And also with you.

PASSING OF THE PEACE: The peace of God be with you.
And also with you.

+ + + + + + + +
TUESDAY: Bible Study: Sin and Forgiveness-the New Testament.

WEDNESDAY: Rap: What would you like to do for Gay Pride Week - What can we plan?

SUNDAY: Easter Dawn Service, 8:00 a.m. at Mardi Gras Park. and breakfast at Shoney's following.

MONDAY, 6:00 p.m., bar opens, 7:00 dinner. National Assoc. of Social Workers honors Shirley Lamber and Rev. Marge Ragona as Mobile's "Private Citizen of the Year" for their work with the Buddy Program.

DISTRICT CONFERENCE: April 29,30, May 1. Charleston, S.C. Registration is \$25.00, must be in by March 28th (Monday) or no breakfast on Saturday. 8x8 panels memorializing our church's members lost to AIDS need to go with us. If you would like to make one, please see Rev. Marge.

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH AT MOBILE

1600 Center Street Mobile, AL 36604
Rev. Marge Ragona, Pastor (205) 476-9142
Passion Sunday March 27, 1988
Singspiration WELCOME Announcements

CALL TO WORSHIP: In you, O God, I take refuge, let me never be put to shame.

P: In your justice rescue me; incline your ear to me, make haste to deliver me!

L: Be my rock of refuge, a strnghold to give me safety.

P: You are my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake you will lead and guide me.

L: You will free me from the snares set for me, for you are my refuge.

P: Into your hands I commend my spirit, O God; you will redeem me, O faithful God.

OPENING HYMN: How Great Thou Art 48

READING OF THE PASSION NARRATIVE

NARRATOR: When the hour arrived, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them:

JESUS: "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. I tell you, I will not eat again until it is fulfilled in the dominion of God."

NARRATOR: Then taking a cup, he offered a blessing and thanks and said:

JESUS: "Take this and divide it among you; I tell you, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the coming of the reign of God."

NARRATOR: Then taking bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying:

JESUS: This is my body to be given for you. Do this as a remembrance of me."

NARRATOR: He did the same with the cup after eating, saying as he did so:

JESUS: This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood which will be shed for you.

And yet the hand of my betrayer is with me at this table. The Son of Man is following out his appointed course, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed."

Narrator: But Peter said,
 Peter: "No, sir, not I!"
 Narrator: About an hour after that another spoke more insistently:
 Man: "This man was certainly with him, for he is a Galilean."
 Narrator: Peter responded,
 Peter: "My friend, I do not know what you are talking about."
 Narrator: At the very moment he was saying this, a cock crowed. The Lord turned around and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the word that the Lord had spoken to him, "Before the cock crows today you will deny me three times." He went out and wept bitterly.



Meanwhile the men guarding Jesus amused themselves at his expense. They blindfolded him first, slapped him, and then taunted him:

Soldier: **"Play the prophet; which one struck you?"**

Narrator: And they directed many other insulting words at him. At daybreak, the elders of the people, the chief priests, and the scribes assembled again. Once they had brought him before their council, they said,

Caiaphas: **"Tell us, are you the Messiah?"**

Jesus: "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I question you, you will not answer. This much only will I say: 'From now on, the Son of Man will have his seat at the right hand of the Power of God.'"

Caiaphas: **"So you are the Son of God?"**

Jesus: "It is you who say I am."

Caiaphas: **"What need have we of witnesses? We have heard it from his own mouth."**

*Narrator: *Then the entire assembly rose up and led Jesus before Pilate. They started his prosecution by saying,

Caiaphas: **"We found this man subverting our nation, opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, and calling himself the Messiah, a king."**

Narrator: Pilate asked him,
 Pilate: **"Are you the king of the Jews?"**

Jesus: "That is your term."

Narrator: Pilate reported to the chief priests and the crowds,

Pilate: "I do not find a case against this man."

Narrator: But they insisted,

Caiaphas: **"He stirs up the people by his teaching throughout the whole of Judea, from Galilee, where he began, to this very place."**

Narrator: On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean; and when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who also happened to be in Jerusalem at the time.

Herod was extremely pleased to see Jesus. From the reports about him he had wanted for a long time to see him, and he was hoping to see him work some miracle. He questioned Jesus at considerable length, but Jesus made no answer. The chief priests and scribes were at hand at accuse him vehemently. Herod and his guards then treated him with contempt and insult, after which they put a magnificent robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. Herod and Pilate, who had previously been set against each other, became friends from that day.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the ruling class, and the people, and said to them:

Pilate: "You have brought this man before me as one who subverts the people. I have examined him in your presence and have no charge against him arising from your allegations. Neither has Herod, who therefore has sent him back to us; obviously this man has done nothing that calls for death. Therefore I mean to release him, once I have taught him a lesson."

Narrator: The whole crowd cried out,

People: **"Away with this man, release Barabbas for us!"**

Narrator: This Barabbas had been thrown in prison for causing an uprising in the city, and for murder. Pilate addressed them again, for he wanted Jesus to be the one he released. But they shouted back,

People: **"Crucify him, crucify him!"**

Narrator: He said to them for the third time,

Pilate: "What wrong is this man guilty of? I have not discovered anything about him that calls for the death penalty. I will therefore chastise him and release him."

Narrator: But they demanded with loud cries that he be crucified, and their shouts increased in violence. Pilate then decreed that what they demanded should be done. He released the one they asked for, who had been thrown in prison for insurrection and murder, and delivered Jesus up to their wishes. As they led him away, they laid hold of one Simon of Cyrenean who was coming in from the fields. They put a crossbeam on Simon's shoulder for him to carry along behind Jesus. A great crowd of people followed him, including women who beat their breasts and lamented over him. Jesus turned to them and said:



Jesus: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children. The days are coming when they will say, 'Happy are the sterile, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin saying to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' If they do these things in the green wood, what will happen in the dry?"

Narrator: Two others who were criminals were led along with him to be crucified. When they came to Skull Place, as it was called, they crucified him there and the criminals as well, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said,

Jesus: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

Narrator: They divided his garments, rolling dice for them. The people stood there watching, and the leaders kept jeering at him, saying,

Caiaphas: **"He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, the chosen one."**

Narrator: He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, then went down on his knees and prayed in these words:

Jesus: "Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done."

Narrator: An angel then appeared to him from heaven to strengthen him. In his anguish he prayed with all the greater intensity, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. Then he rose from prayer and came to his disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted with grief. He said to them,

Jesus: "Why are you sleeping? Wake up, and pray that you may not be subjected to the trial."

Narrator: While he was still speaking a crowd came, led by the man named Judas, one of the Twelve. He approached Jesus to embrace him. Jesus said to him,

Jesus: "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Narrator: When the companions of Jesus saw what was going to happen, they said,

Peter: **"Lord, shall we use the sword?"**

Narrator: One of them went so far as to strike the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. Jesus said in answer to their question,

Jesus: "Enough!"

Narrator: Then he touched the ear and healed the man. But to those who had come out against him—the chief priests, the chiefs of the temple guard, and the ancients—Jesus said,

Jesus: "Am I a criminal that you come out after me armed with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple you never raised a hand against me. But this is your hour—the triumph of darkness!"



Narrator: They led him away under arrest and brought him to the house of the high priest, while Peter followed at a distance. Later they lighted a fire in the middle of the courtyard and were sitting beside it, and Peter sat among them. A servant girl saw him sitting in the light of the fire. She gazed at him intently, then said,

Woman I: "This man was with him."

Narrator: He denied the fact, saying,

Peter: "Woman, I do not know him."

Narrator: A little while later someone else saw him and said,

Woman II: "You are one of them too."